



Schoelkopf

AMERICAN STORIES
The Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall Collection

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January 17–February 28, 2025

ESSAYS BY

Claire Ittner

Patricia Junker

Carol Troyen

Schoelkopf



Acknowledgments

Schoelkopf Gallery is honored to present *American Stories: The Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall Collection*. I would like to thank Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall for entrusting the gallery with the sale of their collection of engaging and moving American modern art.

We would also like to thank our friend and colleague Barbara Guggenheim for her personal recollections about her time advising Kathleen and Frank, and helping them to acquire the best examples for their collection. Barbara's intuitive and inquisitive nature always helps her clients achieve excellence.

Our longstanding friends, Carol Troyen and Patricia Junker—and new friend, Claire Ittner—are the publication's storytellers and have provided the outstanding text so we might better understand the context and importance of each major work in the Kennedy Marshall Collection. Carol is the Kristin and Roger Servison Curator Emerita of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Among her recent projects are "Charles Sheeler: Late Work," which appeared in the Summer 2016 issue of *American Art*; and *Thomas Cole in the Garden of Eden*, the catalogue of a 2018 exhibition at the Fenimore Museum. Patti established

the American art department at the Seattle Art Museum in 2004, serving as the endowed curator for fourteen years. She was previously Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Amon Carter Museum and Associate Curator of American Paintings at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and has authored many award-winning publications on a variety of topics in the field of American art. Claire is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Her research interests include race and racial legibility, mobility and migration, patronage networks and theories of artistic value, and notions of expertise and training. Her current book project, *Fellow Travelers: The Artist-Researchers of the Rosenwald Fellowship, 1928–1948*, examines an early "genius grant" program and the role it played in the work of a generation of Black artists.

Special thanks are extended to Russell Hassell and Jessie Sentivan for their customary excellence and good humor in designing and copyediting this and all the gallery's publications. They are the very best and always a sheer delight to work with.

We look forward to welcoming you to Schoelkopf Gallery for the exhibition and sale of these special works of art.

Best regards,
Andrew L. Schoelkopf



Foreword

Barbara Guggenheim

As an art advisor, I've had the good fortune to work for some extremely fine collectors, and at the top of the list are Kathleen Kennedy and Frank Marshall. When we first met, almost forty years ago, I was totally smitten by them; they were a magnetic young couple looking for a few paintings for a first home in Santa Monica. As often happens with new collectors, they didn't have a period of art or style they felt passionate about, and they didn't want to set out without a clear direction to follow. They knew they needed advice.

I visited them several times and learned that Kathy, a producer, and Frank, a director/producer, viewed themselves as socially responsible storytellers. A lightbulb went on inside me, and I introduced them to Social Realist, American storytelling art between the wars, and they knew the game was on. Rosy the Riveter, straphangers, soldiers on leave, and street musicians, were all subjects that appealed to them.

Fueled by successes at the box office, with films such as *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars*, what started as a collection of paintings blossomed into a larger collection that included sculpture, photos, drawings, prints, pottery, silver, and first

edition books. The challenge was enormous, but there were plenty of examples of great things on the market. And they so enjoyed learning everything about the period, WPA (Works Progress Association) and Regionalism, the different ways Social Realism was expressed across the states). Not a month went by in all these years that they didn't buy something if it fit into their collection. And as they moved from one house to another, there were more walls and library shelves to fill!

Always interested in learning anew, Kathy and Frank attacked their task with vigor and approached it in ways that fit their insatiable curiosity and indefatigable "work" ethic. If they collected twentieth-century first edition novels made into films, no other collector came close. Silver? They fell for Mexican silver of the period of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and I found myself taking out ads in local Mexican newspapers where silversmiths lived looking for collections.

Now, Kathleen and Frank are, like so often in the stories they tell, closing this chapter and opening the next.

Might not Lincoln say to us today: "It is for us, the living, to dedicate ourselves through work, through frugal conduct of our lives, through fervent sacrifice, to Victory - that those who die for us shall not have died in vain, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth"?



Plates

Charles Burchfield (1893–1967)

I. *Deserted House*, 1918

Watercolor on paper

17½ × 25¼ inches (44.5 × 64.1 cm)

Signed and dated at lower right: Chas Burchfield 1918;
inscribed on verso: April 13, 1918



Paul Starrett Sample (1896–1974)

2. *Celebration*, 1933

Oil on canvas
40 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 48 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (101.9 × 122.2 cm)
Signed at lower left: PAUL SAMPLE

In March 1931, by special invitation, Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Stuart Curry exhibited alongside California's painters in the annual juried show mounted by the Los Angeles Museum. Their entries stood in dramatic contrast to the landscapes of California color and light that by and large made up the productions of the West Coast group, as it spanned both Northern and Southern California. Pasadena's Paul Sample, for example, was represented by a characteristic Impressionist harbor scene. Grant Wood showed his fantastical recreation of *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* (1931; The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Curry sent an equally cinematic picture, a contemporary scene of rural Americans uprooted and on the move, a composite of vignettes observed at a migrant workers roadside camp near his childhood home in Dunavant, Kansas (*Roadmenders' Camp*, 1931; Sheldon Museum of Art,



Fig. 1. Thomas Hart Benton, *Boomtown*, 1928. Egg yolk tempera and oil on canvas, 46 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 54 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (117.2 × 137.8 cm). Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester. Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 1951.1

University of Nebraska). Benton attracted the most press attention with his painting, one that transcended the mere depiction of a place on the American frontier: his *Boomtown* (fig. 1), a picture that surely seemed as applicable to Southern California as it was true to its Texas oil town subject. In Wood, Curry, and Benton, Californians were getting a look at a new American art. And in that moment, in 1931, their influence upon a receptive group of California painters, Sample among them, was direct and immediate.¹

Boomtown had drawn attention as none of the other paintings in the annual did. Its resonance was amplified by the *Los Angeles Times* when it singled out the painting in its long encomium to Benton's newest work, which was unveiled in New York as *Boomtown* went on view in Los Angeles, that being his ten-panel panorama of *America Today*, created for the New School for Social Research.² The paper chose to run a large illustration of the segment titled "The Changing West," a lurid, baroque extravaganza encompassing the cowboy and the cattle drive, the ubiquitous false-front saloons, and the technological advancements that defined the modern West: the oil derrick and the pipeline, the industrialized farm, the airplane, and the movies. The *Times* remarked that *Boomtown* was clearly a study for the panel, but Benton's changing West was not specific to the Texas Panhandle oil town of Borger that had inspired it. For Angelinos, it had all played out—in the ranches and farms of Bakersfield, the oil and gold fields of the Mojave Desert, and the back lots of Hollywood.

By the sudden transformation in his own art, Sample showed how thoroughly he absorbed the new pictures. Little





Fig. 2. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *The Land of the Cockaigne*, 1567. Oil on panel, 20¼ × 30⅞ inches (51.5 × 78.3 cm). Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich, Inv. 8940

more than a year later, Sample painted *Celebration*, his own version of *Boomtown*, a testament to Sample's acuity in grasping, like Benton, the potent symbolism of his own locale in modern America, the changing West.³ He abandoned his painterly technique for what would become his signature crisp and elegant draftsmanship, appropriate to clear pictorial storytelling and akin to the Flemish Old Master realist style of Grant Wood. His viewpoint henceforth would be cinematic, too, panoramic and action-packed.

Boom and bust is the essential story line of the western, and Sample, like others, found the setting for his foray into that genre in the environs around modern-day Randsburg, California, the mining camps there in the 1930s standing as living reminders in the twentieth century of America's old-time gold rush days.⁴ The natural landscape there is of endless barren ridges and of high hills "rising in the midst of a broad expanse of sand, looking not unlike islands rising out of the sea," the early geological survey reported.⁵ Place names were intended to evoke fabled argonauts in exotic

places: here was the iconic King Solomon Mine in the Rand Mountains, so named by aspiring prospectors for the legendary gold fields of South Africa and who settled the nearby town they christened Johannesburg, California.⁶ Benton wrote of the frontier boomtown,

Where industry has sunk its steel into the plains country . . . there is a change in the character of the people . . . There was a belief, written in men's faces, that all would find a share in the gifts of this mushroom town. What if evil and brutal things were being done—people forgot them and laughed in an easy tolerant way as if they were simply unavoidable and natural hazards of life, as inescapable as a dust storm.⁷

Sample's version of what Benton called the "exploitative whoopee party" shows Randsburg miners as the embodiment of that devil-may-care indulgence and waste. Their inebriation is but an extension of the excesses of punch-drunk investors behind the scenes, those who continued to

mine these eternal hills and exploit hapless fortune seekers in an endless pattern of boom and bust. In *Celebration*, rigs randomly dot the vast expanse of unremitting desert landscape. Sample painted an apt metaphor for the California economy in 1933—prospects seemed few and far between.

Celebration is rich with symbol and metaphor, and even puns, like the towers and trestles that are the ore "tipples."⁸ Sample's inspiration for this and subsequent story-telling paintings, he readily acknowledged, was Pieter Brueghel the Elder: *Celebration* is based on the Flemish master's moralizing *The Land of the Cockaigne*, a humorous warning on the dangers of temptation in the mythic land of plenty, a commentary on humankind's natural impulse toward sloth and gluttony (fig. 2).⁹

Sample shows us a diverse brotherhood of miners, with an African American man prominent among them. In the American West, boom and bust could be shared equally. As Benton put it, in places like Borger, Texas—and Sample's Randsburg, California—all "whooped it up" together in pursuit of the next big thing. The rich and the poor—the Native Americans and African Americans and migrants from across the Great Plains, American South, and Mexico—all joined hands "in a great democratic dance."¹⁰

Sample kept *Celebration* before the public for two years, submitting it to important juried exhibitions throughout 1933 and 1934—at the Oakland Art Gallery, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and *Century of Progress* exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. In December 1934, when *Time* magazine reported on the surging movement in American art—"Regionalism" they labeled it—the article named Sample as one of its finest exemplars, hailing from a distinctive Southern California outpost.¹¹ It

seems fair to say that Sample established a new national reputation in large part through the popular and critical success of this seminal California "Regionalist" picture.

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. From the catalogue of the exhibition *Twelfth Annual Exhibition by American Painters and Sculptors* (Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, 1931), Wood's *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* is reproduced on the catalogue cover.
2. Now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; see "Benton Paints Our Economocracy," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1931, 36.
3. In 1935, Sample would paint another boomtown, *Gold Rush Town* (private collection), which seems directly connected to the composition of Benton's *Boomtown* and so offers further testament to the impact that Benton's 1928 work had on the Californian.
4. For a discussion of Sample and Randsburg; see Christina L. Larson, "America Seen through the Work of Paul Sample," PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2015, 110–13.
5. R.W. Pack, "Reconnaissance of the Barstow-Kramer Region, California," *U.S. Geological Bulletin* 541 (1914): 142; available at pubs.usgs.gov. Pack describes the landscape of the Northern and Central Mojave Desert generally as characteristic of the whole of the Great Basin.
6. See Kim Stringfellow, "Desert Gold: Part I," April 18, 2019, pbsocal.org/shows/artbound/desert-gold-part-i.
7. Thomas Hart Benton, *An Artist in America* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1937), quoted in Karal Ann Marling, "Thomas Hart Benton's *Boomtown*: Regionalism Redefined," *Prospects* 6 (October 1981): 82. My reading of *Celebration* owes much to this richly textured contextual study of Benton's seminal Regionalist painting.
8. See Larson's reading of the painting, 110. I am also indebted to the extensive work of Lisa Peters in her lengthy discussion of the painting for the object record created for Debra Force Fine Art, New York. I am grateful to Debra Force for sharing it with me.
9. Robert L. McGrath, *Paul Sample: Painter of the American Scene* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for the Hood Museum of Art, 1988), 35–36.
10. Benton, *An Artist in America*, in Marling, 82.
11. "Art: U.S. Scene," *Time*, December 24, 1934, time.com/archive/6647563/art-u-s-scene.

Michael Lenson (1903–1971)

3. *Against the Sky*, 1935
Oil on canvas
40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm)
Signed at upper left: Lenson



James Ormsbee Chapin (1887–1975)

4. *Nine Workmen*, 1942
Charcoal on paper
18 × 24 inches (45.7 × 61 cm)
Signed and dated at upper left: JAMES CHAPIN - '42



Jacques Schnier (1898–1988)

5. *Relief Panels for Elevator Doors, Helm Building, Fresno: Man Drilling for Oil, Man with Wine Kegs, Man with Bales, Corral, Woman with Grapes, Pigs and Sheep*, 1936

Bronze, in six panels

Each: 10½ × 7½ inches (26.7 × 19.1 cm)

(i) Inscribed and dated at lower center: SCHNIER 36;

inscribed and dated on verso: Jacques Schnier 1936

(ii) Inscribed at lower center: SCHNIER; inscribed and

dated on verso: Jacques Schnier 1936

(iii) Inscribed at lower center: SCHNIER; inscribed and

dated on verso: Jacques Schnier 1936

(iv) Inscribed at lower center: SCHNIER

(v) Inscribed and dated at lower left: SCHNIER '36;

inscribed and dated on verso: Jacques Schnier 1936

(vi) Inscribed at lower center: SCHNIER; inscribed and

dated on verso: Jacques Schnier 1936



Georgia Engelhard (1906–1986)

6. *The White Church*, c. 1930–39

Oil on canvas
18¾ × 32¼ inches (46.4 × 81.9 cm)
Signed on stretcher: Georgia Engelhard

Georgia Engelhard first appeared in public as an artist when she was six years old. Her uncle, the acclaimed photographer and impresario Alfred Stieglitz, was enthusiastic about art he deemed “intuitive,” including the work of children, and as such devoted a number of exhibitions at his gallery, 291, to children’s art. The first of these, in 1912, included several works by Engelhard. In 1916, she made her solo debut, *Water-Colors and Drawings by Georgia S. Engelhard, of New York: A Child Ten Years Old*.

Her exhibition was well received. Charles Caffin, critic for the *New York American*, credited her pictures with “a depth of emotional expression” and a “reaffirmation of the

miracle of instinct.” A *New York Times* reviewer was equally positive: “Miss Engelhard has the gift of seeing true.”¹

Engelhard was the daughter of George Engelhard, a lawyer, and Agnes Stieglitz, the photographer’s second sister. The Engelhards lived in New York City but spent summers at the Stieglitz family compound at Lake George. Engelhard was not only a precocious artistic talent but also precociously sensitive to the feelings of others. She recalled being present as a young teen at Stieglitz-led family discussions of Georgia O’Keeffe’s work and of the painter’s acute discomfort during these conversations.² Engelhard was also precocious physically, as Stieglitz emphasized in photographs he made of her in the nude at Lake George starting in 1920, when she was fourteen years old (fig. 1). They parallel his series devoted to O’Keeffe, Rebecca Salsbury James, and other women. However, because of Engelhard’s age, some critics have been troubled by these photographs and the erotic feelings they revealed.³ Whether or not they were purely artistic, Stieglitz’s attentions did not seem to trouble the free-spirited Engelhard. Of these sessions she noted only how hard it was to hold a pose for a long time.⁴

During those summers, Engelhard developed ties to Stieglitz and O’Keeffe that would last their lifetimes. Stieglitz and O’Keeffe made something of a pet of “Georgia Minor” (they also called her “The Kid” and “The Child”). They mentored her creative interests and provided emotional ballast: the summer after quitting Vassar just shy of graduation in 1927, she went to Lake George.

Engelhard was already celebrated as an equestrienne when in 1926 she hiked up Mount Rainier with her father. This was the start of her illustrious career as a mountain climber. Thereafter, her life would be divided between athletic and artistic pursuits. She climbed mountains in the Rockies and the Alps while honing her skills as a painter and then as a photographer at Lake George under O’Keeffe and Stieglitz.



Fig. 1. Alfred Stieglitz, *Portrait of Georgia Engelhard*, 1922. Gelatin silver print, 9¾ × 8 inches (23.7 × 20.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Carla Emil and Richard Silverstein





Fig. 2. Georgia Engelhard, *Jack in the Pulpit*, c. 1927. Oil on canvas, 42 x 20 inches (106.7 x 50.8 cm). Private collection

Engelhard worked especially hard at her painting in the late 1920s and early '30s, emulating O'Keeffe's style and subjects, sometimes leading to surprisingly similar results.⁵ In its palette and its close up, abstract frontality, Engelhard's *Jack in the Pulpit* (fig. 2) mirrors those in O'Keeffe's famous series. She took on other O'Keeffe subjects, including the New York skyline in homage to O'Keeffe's images featuring the Shelton residential hotel. One of these, *Shelton with Skyscrapers* (location unknown) was included in a group show at the Opportunity Gallery in New York in March 1931. At the same time, Engelhard participated in the Society of Independent Artists' exhibition. Even in the scrum of the huge Independents show her work stood out; the *Times* critic praised its "accomplished treatment of design."⁶

Neither Engelhard's appropriation of O'Keeffe's signature themes nor a reviewer's applause jeopardized the two women's relationship, as they would between O'Keeffe and her sister Ida.⁷ In fact, O'Keeffe and Engelhard seem to have been closest in the early 1930s, Engelhard being one of a very few people the solitary O'Keeffe sought out as a walking and painting companion. In 1932, they drove twice to Canada, where O'Keeffe was drawn to the sober simplicity of the barns and "rather grand crosses," the "beautiful woods and all the villages very primitive." Engelhard was so entranced by the fairytale landscape that, per O'Keeffe, "she nearly lost her mind."⁸ It may have been on one of these trips that Engelhard conceived of two paintings of simple churches, similar in subject but different in mood.

For *Church* (fig. 3), Engelhard chose a format of extreme verticality. The painting is twice as tall as it is wide, and the edges of the canvas tightly frame the sides of the building. She used a blue-black-white palette reminiscent of O'Keeffe's in *Black White and Blue* (1930; National Gallery of Art). The image is severely symmetrical, a severity underscored by the sharp outlines of the church, the dramatic one-point perspective, and the minimally visible brushwork. The setting is fantastic and theatrical: behind the church, receding seemingly to infinity, are a succession of mountains lined up like the wings of a stage set.

The White Church, presumably painted at the same time, is nearly as emphatically horizontal as *Church* is vertical. There is similar reliance on bilateral symmetry and one-point perspective for dramatic effect. Engelhard exchanged the icy palette for a warmer, more verdant color scheme—perhaps paying tribute to the lush terrain of the Gaspé pen-



Fig. 3. Georgia Engelhard, *Church*, c. 1930. Oil on canvas, 48 x 24 inches (121.9 x 61 cm). Birmingham Museum of Art. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Harold and Regina Simon Fund, 2011.24

insula as O'Keeffe did in *Green Mountains, Canada* (1932; Art Institute of Chicago). At the same time, mountains, gray and somewhat ominous, fill the far distance. Engelhard's softer, richer brushwork provides a counterpoint to the discipline of her symmetry and her reliance on crisp outlines, just as the rounded, playful foliage contrasts with the pared-down, geometric shapes of the buildings. The church itself is even simpler than the one in *Church*—there is no pediment and no pillars flanking the door, the spire is reduced to a flat triangle, and the severe, rectangular windows become gently arch-topped spaces. *Church* has an Art-Deco-like feeling, while *The White Church* reflects the deliberately primitive style a number of Engelhard's contemporaries were adopting during this period.

After the summer of 1932, O'Keeffe and Engelhard spent less time together, as O'Keeffe spent more and more time in New Mexico and Engelhard spent more and more time climbing mountains. Yet Engelhard's bond with the family, particularly with Stieglitz, remained strong, especially as by the mid- to late thirties she put aside painting to sharpen her skills as a photographer. Stieglitz was willing for her to turn her camera on him. In 1945, *American Photography* published her essay, "Alfred Stieglitz: Master Photographer," illustrated with portraits she made of him at Lake George. These capture the strength and, as he aged, the vulnerability of her life-long mentor. They bring to mind the first accolades she received as an artist: "Miss Engelhard has the gift of seeing true."

CAROL TROYEN

Notes

1. Charles H. Caffin, *New York American*, reprinted in *Camera Work*, no. 49–50, June 1917, 34; "Art Notes: Water Colors of a 10-Year-Old Girl," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1916, 12.
2. Benita Eisler, *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 213.
3. See Eisler, 267; and Sarah Whitaker Peters, *Becoming O'Keeffe* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 304.
4. Engelhard, "Alfred Stieglitz: Master Photographer," *American Photography* 39 (April 1945): 9, quoted in *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*, by Sarah Greenough (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002), I, 382.
5. Late in life, O'Keeffe remembered being uncertain about whether she or Engelhard had produced a particular canvas. She consulted Engelhard, who identified the painting as hers [Engelhard's]. C.S. Merrill, *My Weekends with O'Keeffe* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 43.
6. Edward Alden Jewell, "With the Independents," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1931, 122.
7. O'Keeffe's jealousy of Ida is described in Sue Canterbury, ed., *Ida O'Keeffe: Escaping Georgia's Shadow* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 2018), 62–68.
8. O'Keeffe to Stieglitz, June 30, 1932, and August 17, 1932, quoted in *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz*, ed. Sarah Greenough (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 631, 642–43.

Charles Sheeler (1883–1965)

7. *Grey Barns*, 1946

Tempera on board
14³/₈ × 20³/₈ inches (37.1 × 51.8 cm)
Signed and dated at lower right: Sheeler–1946

In October 1941, California photographer Edward Weston visited his old friend Charles Sheeler, whom he hadn't seen for twenty years, at Sheeler's home in Ridgefield, Connecticut. During that interval, they remained bound together by mutual admiration and a dedication to modernist photography. Their reunion followed significant events in both artists' careers. In 1937, Weston received a Guggenheim Fellowship (the first ever awarded to a photographer), which underwrote a year of travel throughout the West and another year of intense, creative work in the darkroom. In 1941, a commission from the Limited Editions Club to provide illustrations for a deluxe publication of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* brought him east. During this same period, historian Constance Rourke published a biography of Sheeler, anointing him as an American modernist master. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, put on a major exhibition of his paintings and photographs in 1939. And that same year *Fortune* magazine's



Fig. 1. Charles Sheeler, *Untitled (White Barn with Two Silos in Raking Shadows)*, 1941. Photograph, gelatin silver print, 8 × 10 inches (20.3 × 25.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Lane Collection, 2024.1913

publisher Henry Luce sent Sheeler on a multi-state trip that resulted in his celebrated *Power* series of paintings. These were reproduced in *Fortune* in December 1940, and several of them entered museum collections shortly thereafter.

During Weston's visit, the two artists spent several days making photographs of buildings—mostly old barns—in northwestern Connecticut. Sheeler had always been fascinated by rural architecture, photographing and painting vernacular structures in the teens in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and in Pennsylvania and New England during the following decades. Weston, on the other hand, had photographed barns only occasionally (see, for example, *Barn, Monterey County*, 1934; The Metropolitan Museum of Art). On their 1941 tour, Sheeler and Weston visited a site that Sheeler had photographed and then painted a few years earlier (see *Silo*, 1938, oil on canvas; private collection¹). They also both pointed their cameras toward some farm buildings in New Milford, twenty-five miles north of Ridgefield.² That complex consisted of a long, plain, rectangular barn punctuated with windows, two cylindrical silos capped with rough triangular pediments, a corn crib, and a shed. Weston's photograph (see *Connecticut*, 1941; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) captures the buildings in all their messy complexity, viewing them at an angle, with a broken-down fence in the foreground. Sheeler's photograph (fig. 1) is direct and frontal, the geometries of the structures both insistent and majestic. Weston's photograph was, apparently, a one-off. He did not use it for *Leaves of Grass*, although he may have included it in his 1946 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Sheeler's, on the other hand, would stimulate his work for the rest of his career: between 1942 and 1958 it provided a template for at





Fig. 2. Charles Sheeler, *White Sentinels*, 1942. Tempera on board, 15 × 22 inches (38.1 × 55.9 cm). Private collection

least three temperas and two oils, including the pure and precise *White Sentinels* (fig. 2), painted in 1942, and, four years later, the handsome *Grey Barns*.

For much of his career, Sheeler would turn again and again to certain favorite images, continually renegotiating the balance between realism and abstraction through these motifs. He may have been motivated to paint *Grey Barns* when he saw *White Sentinels* again at his solo show at Downtown Gallery in March 1946 (by then it was owned by Richard Loeb, a discerning New York collector). The years between the two pictures had been difficult for Sheeler. He was painting and photographing less. The war had depressed the art market, and between 1942 and 1945 he largely supported himself as a staff photographer (although one with a lofty title: “Senior Research Fellow in Photography”) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sheeler may have turned to the Connecticut barns to recapture some of the creative energy he felt during Weston’s visit. But since that time, the eloquent, tender realism of pictures like *White Sentinels* had hardened into an almost photographic literalism, which he was struggling to escape. His return to those barns in 1946 coincided with a renewed interest in abstraction. While he had always been dedicated to emphasizing shape, structure, and pattern even in his most descriptive

paintings, these formal elements were now coming to the fore. Critics took notice, applauding his moving on from “effects that connote the anemic tinted photograph” to create “elegant stylizations” that reintroduced the artist as a “quasi-abstractionist.”³ This new, graphic quality is apparent in both his industrial subjects and his images of commonplace architecture, such as *Grey Barns*.

In *Grey Barns*, the forms of the New Milford buildings are still readily recognizable: the two silos with their triangular tops, the long dark roof capping the barn itself, and the rather randomly placed fence posts. The shed is still present at the left, but has become both two-dimensional and transparent, and another long, low building overlaps the barn at right. The staccato pattern of square windows running across the barn has been replaced with a single opaque black door, and many other details, such as the stone foundation painted with such delicacy in *White Sentinels*, have been smoothed away. If *White Sentinels* is an idealized view of the buildings Sheeler recorded in his photograph, with all signs of age and wear eliminated, *Grey Barns* reduces and idealizes the barn complex even further, into a rich cadence of overlapping ghostly geometric shapes and pure flat color. While completely legible, it is at the same time abstract and somewhat mysterious.



Fig. 3. Charles Sheeler, *On a Connecticut Theme*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 19½ × 29½ inches (48.6 × 74 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Lawrence H. Bloedel Bequest, 771.48

Grey Barns was painted shortly before October 1, 1946, when Sheeler was invited to Andover, Massachusetts, to be artist-in-residence at the Addison Gallery of American Art. He also had an exhibition there, featuring *Grey Barns* and other pre-residency work. Surprisingly, during this period, he made no paintings. Rather, he spent his time seeking fresh inspiration and making “notes . . . in shorthand,” generally with his camera.⁴ The experience was transformative: It was at Andover that he developed the idea of using photographic composites to generate designs for paintings. Yet some of the traits of his evolving style—the emphasis on overlapping forms, the hardening of shadows into substantial shapes while actual elements become transparent—have their beginnings in earlier works such as *Grey Barns*.

Even after painting *Grey Barns* (and the smaller, related tempera, *Blue Barns* [1946; private collection]), Sheeler was not done with the buildings from New Milford. In 1950, he painted a variant, *Family Group* (Orlando Museum of Art), emphasizing the horizontality of the barn complex and showing the buildings floating in space. And in 1958, working in somewhat larger scale, he created *On a Connecticut Theme* (fig. 3). Painted in the emerald green/deep blue/mauve palette Sheeler favored in the 1950s, *On a Connecticut Theme* illustrates the ultimate development of Sheeler’s new

method. He produced the painting’s design by sandwiching together, then printing, negatives he made in Connecticut nearly twenty years before. We now see three silos, two separate stone foundations, and any number of shadows that are as substantial as the forms that cast them. The result is a calliope of shapes very different from the processional dignity of *Grey Barns*. *On a Connecticut Theme* is vibrant while *Grey Barns* is serene; energetic, where *Grey Barns* is elegant and restrained. Each painting, in its own way, testifies to Sheeler’s continuing affection for these unprepossessing buildings, buildings that were for him an ongoing source of stimulation and richness.

CAROL TROYEN

Notes

1. *Silo* is reproduced in Carol Troyen and Erica E. Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), p. 163.
2. Thanks to James Maroney, who many years ago identified the location of these barns.
3. Edward Alden Jewell, “Caravaggio & Co.,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 1946, 6.
4. Sheeler, interview with Bartlett Cowdrey, December 9, 1958, Charles Sheeler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Romare Bearden (1911–1988)

8. *House in Cotton Field*, 1968

Collage of various papers on fiberboard
30 × 40 inches (76.2 × 101.6 cm)
Signed at upper left: romare bearden

Romare Bearden created *House in Cotton Field* in 1968, drawing both on his own childhood memories of the American South, and his investment in making art that spoke to the realities of Black life in the United States.¹ It utilizes the collage style—combining cut-out photographs gleaned from magazines, newspapers, and books with bright swathes of colored paper—that would become Bearden’s signature and preferred medium, although at that time he had been working in collage only a few years. While his interest in art had grown from his work as a political cartoonist during college, the early decades of Bearden’s career had been spent as a painter, including figurative Social Realist work during the 1930s, as well as experimentations with abstraction in the 1940s and 1950s; it was not until 1964, spurred in part by his effort to find a way of working collaboratively with other Black artists interested in the Civil Rights Movement, that Bearden would begin working in collage.² Very quickly, he found the medium suited to his interests as an artist—allowing him to conjoin sharply disjunctive, fragmentary materials into a new order, while at the same time giving compelling material form to what Robert G. O’Meally calls “the complex *layeredness*” of Black American life (emphasis original).³

House in Cotton Field depicts a cabin at the edge of an expansive field of cotton—but it is also a portrait of a family in the tender, twilight moments at the end of the day. In the golden light of the setting sun, two figures work in a field, making the most of the last daylight to finish the day’s hoeing and harvesting—while an older figure, closer to the

house, stands at the edge of a verdant patch of green, perhaps about to begin gathering food for the family’s dinner. Through the open door of the cabin, meanwhile, we glimpse a young woman in the midst of undressing—and a young child makes his way along the dirt path toward the house.

In *House in Cotton Field*, the abundant detail of Bearden’s earliest black-and-white photomontages (fig. 1) has been pared back, giving over to a starker, but also more vividly colored composition. Photo-collaged elements are used selectively—as abbreviations rather than descriptions of the cotton field’s furrows, the dirt of the path outside the cabin, or the quilt in its interior—and they are carefully balanced with fields of bright, unmodulated color reminiscent of Henri Matisse’s paper cut-outs.⁴ In the counterpoint between these elements, we can also discern the work’s rigorous organizational structure—the way the cabin’s right edge cleanly cleaves the composition in half, for example—which grants the work a sense of stability and order. Just the year after he completed *House in Cotton Field*, Bearden would in fact explicate this approach to composition in “Rectangular Structure in My Montage Paintings,” an essay that detailed the influence of his early training in mathematics, as well as his desire to forge a language that was “strict and classical, in the manner of great Benin heads” or the “methods of De Hooch and Vermeer.”⁵

Bearden’s stated desire was to make work with the enduring power of African sculpture or seventeenth-century Dutch painting—but he wanted to do so while attending





Fig. 1. Romare Bearden, *The Conjur Woman*, 1964. Cut-and-pasted printed paper and gouache on board, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (30.6 × 23.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund, 376.1971

closely to the experience and lived realities of Black Americans. In *House in Cotton Field*, he brings his rigorous compositional program and masterful sense of color to bear on the humble lives of a family of sharecroppers, in a way that refuses to romanticize the difficulty of their daily existence, while also dignifying the work that allows them to survive. The collage does not disguise the hardscrabble nature of the family's lives, registered in the gnarled hands of the older figure and the cabin's pieced-together construction. At the same time, *House in Cotton Field* pointedly focuses on the family's industry—the two figures who remain in the field late in the day, or the older figure who stands, unbowed and at the ready, to the cabin's right. Bearden even chose to utilize an image of a ruler within the cabin's construction, a testament to the ethic of discipline that structures the family's lives. It is this discipline that seems to unite the family—whose members are not pictured gathered in a moment of leisure, but whose disparate activities nevertheless speak to their commitment to each other, to their collective survival and well-being.

As closely as *House in Cotton Field* attends to the experiences of its subjects, lived without luxury or many modern comforts, it is yet not an image solely of unending work or hardship—but also of cooperation, kinship, and resilience. Even in its depiction of the backbreaking labor involved in growing and picking cotton, it also pictures the family united in a common purpose; in the field, a male and a female figure toil side by side, lightening by sharing the load—their labor, like the roof of their humble home, touched by the rays of the setting sun, which bathe the

scene in a quasi-celestial light. The figure at the work's near-center, meanwhile, gestures to the strong, stabilizing force of the family's matriarch—who stands, her back against a tree, as a kind of literal pillar within the work. A version of Bearden's many "conjur women"—similarly forceful Black female figures, whose positioning at thresholds and border-places speak to their capacity to bridge natural and spiritual worlds (see fig. 1)—the center figure's positioning, along with her knotty hands, imply a deep reservoir of vernacular and environmental knowledge.⁶ Her bare feet linking the sandy area around the house to the fertile field of green that extends beyond the work's lower right corner, she signals that it is not just cotton that the family is cultivating—but also the modes of care and intergenerational knowledge ultimately as important to their subsistence.⁷

CLAIRE ITTNER

Notes

1. Bearden was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, near Charlotte, and frequently returned there during summers to visit his grandparents. On the importance of the South to his imagery, see *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections* (Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum, 2011), the accompanying catalogue for an exhibition that included *House in Cotton Field*.

2. Bearden turned to collage after first suggesting that it be used as the basis for a collaborative project created by the members of Spiral, a group of African American artists that he had helped to found in 1963. Spiral was formed in response to the Civil Rights Movement as a forum for discussion about the role that art should play in broader political struggle. Although the other Spiral members were uninterested in working in collage, Bearden took up his own suggestion, and began working in the medium beginning in the mid-1960s. On Spiral, Bearden's early work in collage, and the relationship between his art and politics, see Kobena Mercer, "Romare Bearden: African American

Modernism at Midcentury," in *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, eds. Michael Ann Holly and Keith P. F. Moxey (Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute, 2003), 29–46; and Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Political Bearden," in *The Romare Bearden Reader*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 256–69.

3. Robert G. O'Meally, "An Introductory Essay," in *The Romare Bearden Reader*, 23. See also Elizabeth Alexander, "The Genius of Romare Bearden," in *Something All Our Own: The Grant Hill Collection of African American Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

4. On Bearden's engagement with the work of Henri Matisse, see entries from the journal of Romare Bearden, 1947, printed in *The Romare Bearden Reader*, 101; Calvin Tomkins, "Putting Something Over Something Else," *The New Yorker*, November 20, 1977; and Albert Murray, "Bearden Plays Bearden," in *Romare Bearden: 1970–1980* (Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum, 1980).

5. Romare Bearden, "Rectangular Structure in My Montage Paintings," *Leonardo* 2 (1969): 14.

6. On Bearden's interest in "conjure women," see the essays in *Conjuring Bearden*, ed. Richard J. Powell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), especially Richard J. Powell, "Changing, Conjuring Reality," 19–33; and Leslie King-Hammond, "Bearden's Crossroads: Modernist Roots/Riffing Traditions," in *Romare Bearden: Southern Recollections*, 86–103.

7. The area of green that extends beyond the lower right corner of the work might be seen as one of what Bearden called the "open corner"—a concept he learned from studying Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy. One corner of the work is left deliberately open, which, as Bearden claimed repeatedly, "allow[ed] the observer a starting point" in viewing the painting—an entry-point from which they might even be said to *complete* it. See Bearden and Carl Holty, *The Painter's Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting* (New York: Crown Publishing, 1969), 113–15; Charles H. Rowell, "Inscription at 'The City of Brass': An Interview with Romare Bearden," *Callaloo* 36 (Summer 1988): 428–46; and Robert G. O'Meally, "The 'Open Corner' of Black Community and Creativity: From Romare Bearden to Duke Ellington and Toni Morrison," in Robert G. O'Meally, *Antagonistic Cooperation: Jazz, Collage, Fiction, and the Shaping of African American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 86–116.

Ben Shahn (1898–1969)

9. *American Couple*, 1938

Tempera on paper mounted on board
23 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (60.3 × 60.3 cm)
Signed at lower right: Ben Shahn

In May 1938, Ben Shahn—painter, muralist, graphic artist, and photographer—was made “Principal Photographer” in the Farm Security Administration (FSA) by the department’s head, the agricultural economist and photographer Roy Stryker. Shahn thus joined the top rank of Stryker’s principal field lieutenants, who included Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. By documenting the dire situation of farmers devastated by Dust Bowl drought and the ruinous economic Depression, they were serving President Franklin Roosevelt’s effort to resettle agricultural workers. Shahn had already photographed the plight of sharecroppers in the Ozarks and throughout the South in 1935 and resettlement efforts there in 1937, but 1938 would bring a different kind of assignment, and it would have a direct impact on his further development as a painter.

Shahn told Stryker that he wished to make a sweeping portrait of “the average American” now and would focus on residents of a dozen or so small towns around Columbus, Ohio, near his wife’s hometown.¹ Both men agreed that the FSA had already focused so much of its work on the Depression’s casualties that it had overlooked the story of small town folk who had sustained community and traditions in hard times. In 1938 the impulse to record this side of the American experiment was driven by a widely recognized need to counter the rising tide of fascism abroad with

a message underscoring the unshakable strength of the great democratic institution that was Main Street, Small Town, U.S.A.²

Shahn’s collective portrait of small town Ohio would be his most ambitious FSA project—numbering nearly three thousand images. So consuming an effort through the summer months of 1938 would understandably shape the painter’s psyche in its aftermath.

Shahn came to paint what he called a new “personal realism,” different from “social realism,” he explained, based not on a program but on observation.³ In his photographic record he had made notes, provided captions, even followed Stryker’s “script” in shaping a story of small-town people to some degree. Painting, he came to see, could bestow greater nuance and ambiguity on a subject, suggesting not just timely circumstances, and not just an idea of American character, but a deep probing of the human soul. Soon after the Ohio project, Shahn abandoned photography, yet the lessons provided by his practice there, the candidness and lack of affectation he captured through snapshot photography, had proved, he said, “a very helpful thing in the whole quality of my work.”⁴

Shahn memorialized his photographic work in the 1939 painting, *Self-Portrait Among Churchgoers* (fig. 1), in which he depicts himself with his hand-held Leica camera





Fig. 1. Ben Shahn, *Self-Portrait Among Churchgoers*, 1939. Tempera on board, 20 × 29½ inches (50.8 × 74.9 cm). Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas

photographing amid Sunday worshippers. In their quietude they take no notice of the stranger among them who appears innocuously to be snapping random shots of subjects beyond the church. But Shahn is here revealing the secret of his practice—the essential secret of the Ohio series’ intense, up-close look at these American faces, faces like that of the contemplative old man in the intimate painted portrait that is *American Couple* (pl. 9). Shahn’s small Leica easily fit into his pocket, and it was always at the ready. His trick was that he had fitted the camera with a right-angle view finder that, when deployed, allowed him to face ninety degrees away from his unsuspecting subjects as he took their pictures. We see him using it in his reflection caught in the snapshot of a pair of Circleville, Ohio, denizens idling on an afternoon and eyeing the action of the odd photographer before them, unaware that it is they who are his subjects (fig. 2).⁵ One could well have provided the face that fills the page in *American Couple*. Shahn wanted in his photographic portraits complete candidness, a total lack of self-consciousness, especially in such penetrating close-ups, and he succeeded throughout the series by his surreptitious methods.

Who are the “American Couple”? They might be churchgoers. Or, more poignantly, perhaps they are sober spectators at a neighbor’s foreclosure auction, or patriotic on-lookers at a veteran’s parade, or the stoic needy waiting to receive relief commodities (fig. 3)—Shahn recorded all of these small town moments and more in 1938 in close-up photographs of small town folk unchecked, but briefly, by the impulse to keep up appearances.

Mural projects consumed Shahn over the next three years. Among them was the commission he won from the U.S. Treasury Department Section of Fine Arts in October 1940 to paint frescoes in the main corridor of what was to be the new Social Security Building in Washington, D.C., the physical embodiment of the sweeping reform act that Roosevelt had signed into law in 1935. “I am proud to put a face on it” Shahn wrote to Section head Edward Bruce.⁶ As Shahn conceived it, one half of the series would revisit the need for government-mandated social and economic reforms, and the other half would celebrate the outcomes, a domestic and industrial building boom chief among them. “People want decent homes to live in; they want to locate them where

Fig. 2. Ben Shahn, *Street Scene, Circleville, Ohio*, summer 1938. Print from 35mm nitrate negative. Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, item 2017731438



Fig. 3. Ben Shahn, untitled photo, possibly related to the group *Waiting for Relief Commodities, Urbana, Ohio*, summer 1938. Print from 35mm nitrate negative. Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, item 2017732425



they can engage in productive work; and they want some safeguards against misfortune which cannot be wholly eliminated from this man-made world of ours,” Roosevelt had said of the tenets of social security.⁷ *Study for “The Meaning of Social Security”* (pl. 10), is Shahn’s tempera for that segment of the mural that would celebrate these aspirations.

In 1944 Shahn was called upon to lead a new graphic art division of the political action committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO-PAC), having produced posters and pamphlets for the union ever since its founding years earlier. The immediate goal of the CIO-PAC was to reelect Roosevelt for a fourth term, but it also aimed to become a permanent pro-labor political organization. The graphic arts, Shahn knew, offered the widest possible reach, and he threw himself into fully applying all of his communicative skill and exploiting all the varying forms of printing arts on behalf of both Roosevelt and American working men and women. He directed a team of like-minded artists and writers in the development of posters to advance the crusade. In those heady days, Shahn worked alongside F. Palmer Weber, a political philosopher by training and a life-long civil rights activist.⁸ His bold graphic symbol of power in solidarity, *Three Hands*—one brown, one black, one white—was the artist’s gift to Weber.

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. Shahn wrote little on the project but recorded his intention in an interview with Richard Doud, April 14, 1962, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. See John Raeburn on the Ohio project in *Ben Shahn’s American Scene: Photographs 1938* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 5, 183n2.
2. The term had been invoked by Stryker in his insistence on realizing a collective portrait of democratic life; Raeburn, 5–7, 184n7.
3. Shahn, in his lectures on theory and practice, *The Shape of Content* (1975), quoted in Howard Greenfeld, *Ben Shahn: An Artist’s Life* (New York: Random House, 1998), 151.
4. Shahn, quoted in Raeburn, 16.
5. A full description of Shahn’s technique is found in Raeburn, 15–16.
6. Shahn to Bruce, quoted in U.S. General Services Administration, “Fine Arts Collection: The Meaning of Social Security,” art.gsa.gov/art-works/637/the-meaning-of-social-security.
7. From President Roosevelt’s address, June 8, 1934, quoted in Living New Deal/Cohen Federal Building: Shahn Frescoes—Washington, D.C., livingnewdeal.org/sites/wilbur-j-cohen-building-shahn-frescoes-washington-dc. The Social Security Administration never occupied the building. It is now the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building.
8. See Greenfeld, 132–33, 197–208.

Ben Shahn (1898–1969)

10. *Study for "The Meaning of Social Security,"* c. 1940–42

Tempera on paper
13½ × 10½ inches (34.3 × 26.7 cm)
Signed at lower right: Ben Shahn



Ben Shahn (1898–1969)

11. *Three Hands*, 1950

Gouache on board
Image size: 7¼ × 14½ inches (18.4 × 35.9 cm)
Board size: 14⅝ × 20 inches (37.1 × 50.8 cm)
Signed and dedicated at lower right: To Palmer D.Q. Weber in memory of 2 memorable years / Ben Shahn



Thornton Oakley (1881–1953)

12. *The Weaving of the Bridge*, c. 1909

Oil on canvas
27¼ × 18 inches (69.2 × 45.7 cm)
Signed and inscribed on verso: Thornton Oakley /
10 S. 18 St. Philadelphia



Fig. 1. Building the Manhattan Bridge, from *Je Sais Tout* magazine, France, October 1909

For Thornton Oakley, the illustrator's art was the noblest of artistic ambitions; he believed it had the power to convey human virtue with the utmost clarity. Oakley was a child of a golden age, an age of wonder, and it was illustrators for the lavish weeklies and monthlies, like *Harper's* and *Century*, who offered vivid interpretations of every spectacular achievement of the day, from visionary architecture to bridge building. He grew up admiring the magazine art of Howard Pyle, Edwin Austen Abbey, and Joseph Pennell, and though he trained initially as an architect at the University of Pennsylvania, Oakley directed his enthusiasm for the building arts toward illustration. He entered under the tutelage of the esteemed Pyle and joined the ranks of the exceptional illustrators who emerged from Pyle's Wilmington, Delaware studio, Newell Convers Wyeth among them.¹

Oakley was in thrall to the modern age of invention. He was the favored artist for depicting the Herculean efforts of mere men to “control matter,” as he put it, to dig and build as never before in a quest to conquer nature's limitations on human progress.² He was the obvious choice for the series that would illustrate writer Edward Hungerford's poetic paean to the modern bridge as a great civilizing force, a “weaver” of once isolated communities into a great collective force of humanity, and a construct that made

“weavers” of modern men who would spin and hang the steel cables. His subject was the Manhattan Bridge, a new suspension structure over the East River.³

For Hungerford's piece in *Harper's Monthly*, Oakley painted the heroics of men who laid the caissons (there is no feat harder “in the weaving of the bridge,” Hungerford wrote) and raised the beams that would support the cables.⁴ This particular feat of modern bridge building, the Manhattan Bridge, was being well documented in photographs, and Oakley had a wealth of material to draw upon to inform his own observations at the various sites (fig. 1). His most dramatic composition from the group is this vertiginous view of fearless men who seem to float, untethered and nonchalantly, high above the water below as they work to construct the long narrow footpaths across the temporary cables that will carry the men who will weave the sustaining fabric of the bridge. They were the showmen of the of the crew, Hungerford said of them, delighting in the attention that their daring attracted.

Oakley's illustrations for “The Weaving of the Bridge” were to appear “in tint” in *Harper's Monthly*, and he painted them in oil.⁵ He had been taught by Pyle to think of his subjects in terms of color and the full range of darks and lights, and so oil was the preferred medium of the Pyle school for the most elaborate work. In this case, color is essential to establishing the vast distance between the vague gray smoky cityscape and river far below and the living, breathing men who fill the foreground.

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. Oakley laid out his philosophy in a long review of the illustrators he admired; see Thornton Oakley “Remarks on Illustration and Pennsylvania's Contributors to Its Golden Age,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 71, no. 1 (January 1947): 3–18.
2. Oakley, 9.
3. Edward Hungerford, “The Weaving of the Bridge,” *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, June 1909, 221–32.
4. Hungerford, 224.
5. The term is applied to Oakley's illustrations in the Table of Contents to the issue.



Louis Lozowick (1892–1973)

13. *High Voltage—Cos Cob*, 1930

Oil on canvas
18 × 24 inches (45.7 × 61 cm)
Signed at lower right: Louis Lozowick;
signed on verso: Louis Lozowick

During the 1920s, Louis Lozowick was the consummate Machine Age artist. His primary subject matter, American industrial architecture and modern technology, and his style, marked by pure, geometric forms, taut edges, and strong flat color, embodied the utopian belief in the machine as both a transformative cultural force and a rich source for the artist in America.

Born in Ukraine, Lozowick came to the United States in 1906 and studied at the National Academy of Design and Ohio State University. He joined in the army in 1918, and upon being discharged, he traveled widely in America and Europe. In 1920, he settled in Berlin, where he became part of the European avant-garde. He began making lithographs, which became his signature medium, and produced a group of dynamic abstract portraits of American cities that defined each city by its most prominent industry: Pittsburgh by its steel mills, Minneapolis by its grain silos, and so on. Lozowick returned to the U.S. in 1924. His crisp style and preference for industrial themes dovetailed with the innovative style now known as Precisionism just then coming to the forefront of American art. In 1927 he helped organize the landmark Machine Age Exposition, and his catalogue essay, “The Americanization of Art,” became a manifesto for the movement. There he asserted that the geometric forms of industrial design were the inspiration for “a solid plastic structure of

great intricacy and subtlety. . . . The true artist will . . . objectify the dominant experience of our epoch in plastic terms that possess value for more than this epoch alone.”¹

For the next several years, Lozowick’s art reflected that vision. His 1929 lithograph, *High Voltage—Cos Cob* (fig. 1), pays homage to the electric power plant in Cos Cob, Connecticut, a key facility in the electrification of the railroad. Lozowick precisely describes but also celebrates this transformative technology. The grainy black and white of his medium evokes the gritty power of industry. The electric wires overhead form elegant metallic filigrees. The tower at left is rendered as a graphic pattern of geometric shapes and voids “of great intricacy and subtlety.” The viewer is positioned to gaze upward, in awe of American industrial triumph.

By the end of the decade, however, Lozowick’s belief in American technology and art’s role in promoting it had waned. The stock market crash and subsequent Depression cast technological advancement in a less positive light. Lozowick’s work became more descriptive, less abstract. Figures occur more frequently. Sometimes (for example, *Above the City*, 1932, lithograph), they are portrayed heroically. But elsewhere, they seem diminished by industrial power.

High Voltage—Cos Cob, the oil painting Lozowick made after the lithograph, reflects his growing disillusionment with technology and his commitment to a new kind of social



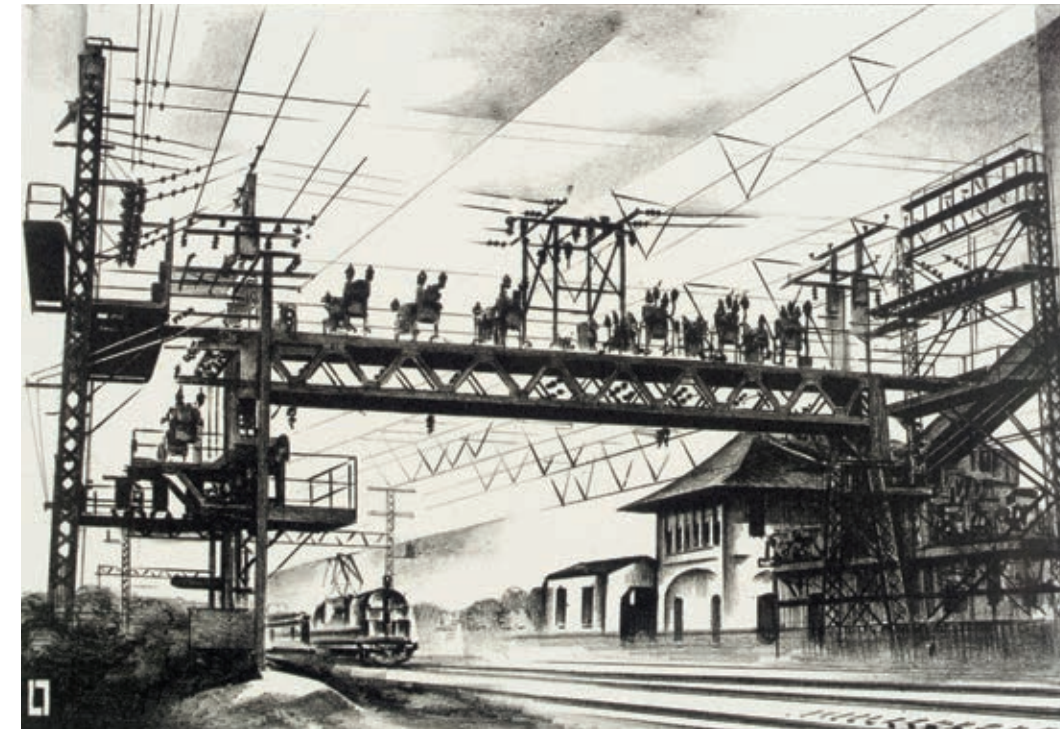


Fig. 1. Louis Lozowick, *High Voltage—Cos Cob*, 1929. Lithograph on paper, image: 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (16.7 × 23.9 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. Gift of Adele Lozowick, 1980.43.45

change. The black-and-white palette of the lithograph—a palette of crisp efficiency and mechanical purity—becomes much more somber in the oil. The day is overcast and gray tones predominate, with muted brick red articulating the trains and buildings. Geometric shapes are still prominent, but the soaring lines of the wires and tower have become somewhat ominous, their formal perfection almost a rebuke to the lumpen figure at left. He gazes on the scene as an outsider, from a distance. He is unshaven, his clothes are somewhat shapeless, and his body language suggests not awe but disappointment. His distance from the scene suggests that, if he once worked at the power plant, he does not any longer. Lozowick has converted an energetic scene into a dystopic one.

Lozowick in the 1930s was increasingly politically aware and increasingly disenchanted with machine-age culture. His art became less abstract and more humanistic. While some of his pictures celebrated workers, others, like *High Voltage*, express and evoke sympathy for those betrayed by America's industrial prowess. Once part of the Precisionist avant-garde, Lozowick now positioned himself on the side of the worker and not the machine.

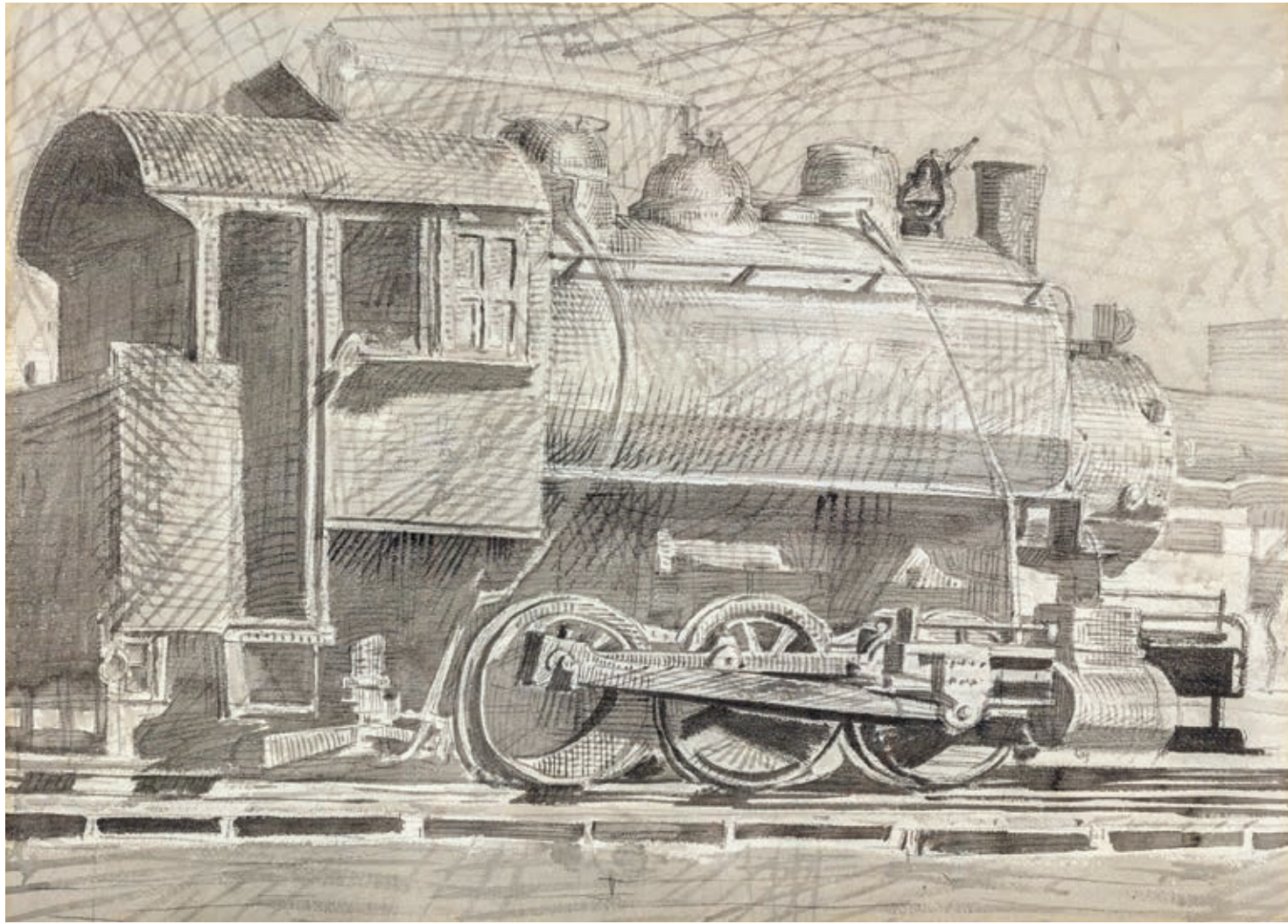
CAROL TROYEN

Note

1. Louis Lozowick, "The Americanization of Art," in Jane Heap et al., *Machine-Age Exposition* (New York: Little Review, 1927), 19.

Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)

14. *Locomotive Engine No. 15, Moving Right*, c. 1928–32
Ink and charcoal on paper
22¾ × 30¼ inches (57.8 × 76.7 cm)



Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)

15. *Locomotive*, 1929
Watercolor and pencil on paper
14 × 20 inches (35.6 × 50.8 cm)
Signed and dated at lower right:
Reginald Marsh 1929



Paul Starrett Sample (1896–1974)

16. *Erie Railroad #187*, c. 1935
Watercolor and pencil on paper
21 × 29 inches (53.3 × 73.7 cm)
Signed at lower right: PAUL SAMPLE



Raphael Gleitsmann (1910–1995)

17. *By the Tracks, Dennison, Ohio*, 1946
Oil on board
35 × 48 inches (88.9 × 121.9 cm)
Signed and dated at lower left: Raphael
Gleitsmann / 1946 / Raphael S. Gleitsman



Francis Criss (1901–1973)

18. *New York Waterfront*, 1944–45

Oil on canvas
30 × 30 inches (76.2 × 76.2 cm)
Signed at lower left: Criss

Francis Criss devoted much attention to one landmark on Manhattan's industrial landscape: the Burns Brothers Coal Company loading operation at the Twenty-Second Street docks in Manhattan.¹ The site was a distinctly compact and towering assemblage of boldly geometric structures that from a particular vantage could appear to stand in splendid isolation against the sky, a view afforded by the open expanse of the East River beyond. The various constructions at dockside here could be compressed by the eye into a totemic erection of concrete and steel composed of the firm's giant blue and white cylindrical coal bins and its elevator and crane immediately behind. Visually attached to the pile was a squat old brick warehouse from another era, sitting now like the portico to a towering classical temple.

The Burns Brothers site drew Criss back to it in his imagination repeatedly—perhaps more than any other subject—



Fig. 1. Francis Criss. *Melancholy Interlude*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 30 inches (64.8 × 76.2 cm). Private collection

and not just for the appeal that its geometric classicism held for the Precisionist painter. Criss was disposed to view the built environment on more than its own aesthetic terms. Treading a line in his art between abstraction and representation, and between emotional detachment and psychological connection, Criss, by a process of selection and reduction, shaped the observed industrial landscape into subjective constructs that are his private musings and pointed commentary. In 1933 he first employed the Burns Brothers plant as a symbol of seemingly impossible national aspirations in Depression times, in his Surrealist painting, *Pie in the Sky* (University of Arizona Museum of Art). Six years later he essayed it again in a trio of closely related, highly reductive variants based on a single compositional template. His point is not so obvious as it was in the earlier painting—the phrase “pie in the sky” is literally present there in the cloud forms. But in their stasis, silence, and emptiness the three subsequent compositions—the aptly titled *Melancholy Interlude* (fig. 1), and two canvases titled simply *New York Waterfront* (1939; Vassar College Museum of Art and c. 1940; Detroit Institute of Arts)—are equally expressive and unnerving. They suggest a city or a nation on pause, a collective holding of the breath, perhaps, as the country suffered from yet another wave of economic collapse in 1939 and was made to ponder the coming of another ruinous war in Europe. Five years later the series required an exultant end note, however, this painting, *New York Waterfront*, painted in 1944–45, when victory in Europe seemed imaginable and American industry now ran full throttle to serve that end.²

Criss developed his *New York Waterfront* series from drawings made on graph paper, so as to get the exact relative



proportions of the bins and elevator, to analyze the intricate geometry of the loading crane, and to fully understand both a coal elevator's form and its function (fig. 2).³ These graph paper drawings were also aids to scaling up the composition for transfer to canvas. And they were necessary, of course, to editing an image to abstraction. We are told that Criss used other mechanical devices as well—many of his own making—to find ways to ensure fidelity to his subjects and consistency across multiple canvases: visiting his studio sometime in the early 1940s, writer Grace Pagano, there to interview Criss about his *Melancholy Interlude* from the *New York Waterfront* series, noted the giant-sized projectors and homemade mechanical devices about the place that Criss found “necessary to his profession.”⁴ He had been working

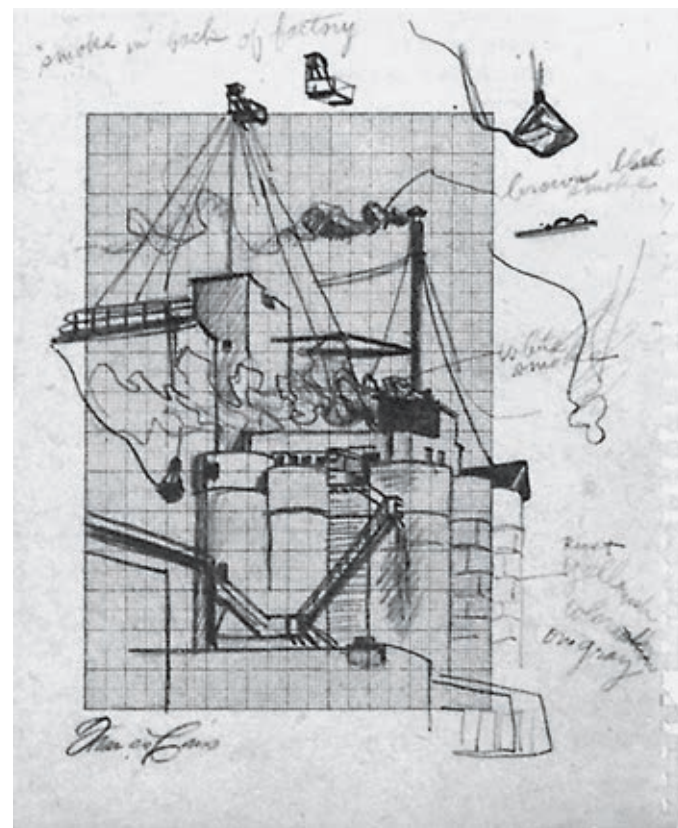


Fig. 2. Francis Criss, *Artist's First Sketch*, published in *Esquire* 24, no. 2 (August 1945): 70

increasingly as a commercial illustrator by this time, and such were the tools of the illustrator's trade, but it is easy to see how the mechanics of duplication might have come into play in his painting practice, particularly with the *Waterfront* series, where the internal dimensions of the four vignettes are the same even as the overall size of the canvases changes.

Did Criss also employ photography? Specifically, did he know the nearly identical photograph of the same Burns Brothers plant made by Berenice Abbott around 1934 (fig. 3)?⁵ Abbott's example might have helped Criss recognize the vantage on his subject that would produce the strongest silhouette—emphatic in Abbott's photograph thanks to the overexposed sky—and the clearest juxtaposition of the elements of old and new New York that made for a compelling implied narrative. He could have known her proposal for the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration, which employed Criss too—Abbott had embarked on an expansive survey documenting *Changing New York*, the odd juxtapositions of new and old in the urban landscape, wanting to show, as she did in her *Burns Brothers Factory*, “the skyscraper in relation to the less colossal edifices which preceded it . . . the past jostling the present.”⁶ She exhibited prints from time to time as her work progressed, even before a final selection of images was published in 1939, and Criss might have encountered the image on view—it did not appear in the published survey, however. Her *Burns Brothers Factory* (fig. 3) is one of the more obscure prints from the extensive series, in fact. Yet the similarity of their compositions, Abbott's and Criss's, is overtly close and not easily dismissed as purely coincidental. The two artists moved in the same orbit: both were members of the leftist American Artists Congress and both taught at the New School for Social Research. In the search for affinities with his painter contemporaries, Criss has eluded categorization—his art is too subjective to group with the formalists associated with the Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler Precisionist camp,



Fig. 3. Berenice Abbott, [*Burns Brothers Factory, Routes 1 & 9, Jersey City, N.J.*], 1938. Gelatin silver print, 9⁷/₁₆ × 7¹/₂ inches (24 × 19.1 cm). Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas, Gift of P/K Associates, New York, New York, P1984.35.13. This later print mis-identified by Abbott some years later as a Burns Brothers plant in Jersey City, but Abbott had photographed another Burns Brothers site in Manhattan.

smoke-belching life. In this time, in war time, the mysterious stripped down abstract form in Criss's earlier paintings acquired necessary accretions—smoke stacks and steel lattice and beams of the crane under load—showing that the beauty of the structure is fully realized in its function.

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Notes

1. The specific site is identified in an article that Criss collaborated on for *Esquire* magazine; see “Esquire's Art Institute,” *Esquire* 24, no. 2 (August 1945): 70.

2. The work was one of three of unspecified subjects commissioned by Theodore L. Shaw, owner of Today's Art Gallery in Boston, in October 1944. It was completed in March 1945. See Shaw to Criss, March 31, 1945; and Criss to Shaw, April 15, 1945, Francis Criss papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. As to the new painting's title, Criss wrote to Shaw, “You may call it New York Waterfront.”

3. The drawings are the focus of the *Esquire* article, which employs them to explain to readers the artist's process of abstracting from reality; “Esquire's Art Institute,” 70–71.

4. Grace Pagano, “Francis Criss,” in *Catalogue of the Encyclopaedia Britannica Collection of Contemporary American Painting* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1945), no. 26.

5. A late print in the collection of the Amon Carter Museum was mis-identified by Abbott as a Burns Brothers plant in Jersey City, but Abbott had photographed other Burns Brothers sites in Manhattan for her *Changing New York* project, and Jersey City would not have fit into her all-consuming New York work. The *Esquire* magazine article, which Criss would have had a hand in preparing, identifies the Twenty-Second Street location of the plant without any equivocation. I am grateful to Abbott scholar Bonnie Yochelson for sharing her insights with me about the actual location, and to Jon Frembling, archivist, Amon Carter Museum, for sharing with me the acquisition record for the museum's print. I am especially indebted to Katherine Criss, the artist's daughter, for offering her experiences of her father's practice (he used photographs on occasion for his commercial work, she confirmed, employing Louis Jacobs) and her knowledge of the rich artistic milieu around her family's brownstone on Ninth Street in Greenwich Village; conversations with the author September 2024.

6. “Photographic Record of New York City Submitted to Art Project, Works Division, Emergency Relief Bureau by Berenice Abbott,” 1935, quoted in Bonnie Yochelson, “Berenice Abbott: A ‘Fantastic Passion’ for New York,” in Yochelson, *Berenice Abbott: Changing New York* (New York: New Press for the Museum of the City of New York, 1997), p. 21.

7. Abbott, “Notes on Research,” undated memorandum, quoted in Yochelson, p. 25.

and too abstract to fall easily into the category of painter recorders of the American Scene. But formally and conceptually Criss seems closely aligned with Abbott. Her expressed ideals for her photographs amply describe the two artists' rhyming pictures of the Burns Brothers coal plant—and they convey the essence of Criss's art:

My photographs are to be documentary as well as artistic . . . This means that they will have elements of formal organization and style; they will use the devices of abstract art if these devices best fit the given subject; they will aim at realism, but not at the cost of sacrificing all esthetic factors. They will tell facts . . . but these facts will be set forth as organic parts of the whole picture, as living and functioning details of the entire complex social scene.⁷

In the five years between his melancholic musings on an industrial site rendered motionless and this spirited reprise of the subject from the same basic formal template, Criss, deciding that the Burns Brothers coal operations and the industrial landscape surrounding it clearly required elaboration, now filled his canvas with clarifying details and

Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)

19. *On the Hudson*, 1941
Tempera on canvas, laid down on board
18 × 24 inches (45.7 × 61 cm)
Signed and dated at lower right: REGINALD / MARSH / 1941



Charles Demuth (1883–1935)

20. *Study for "On 'That' Street,"* 1932
Watercolor and pencil on paper
10½ × 8 inches (26.7 × 20.3 cm)



Isabel Bishop (1902–1988)

21. *Blowing Smoke Rings*, 1938

Oil on panel

20 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (51.1 × 35.9 cm)

Signed at lower right: Isabel Bishop

Perhaps surprisingly, Isabel Bishop once explained that it was Jane Austen who most closely matched her own artistic aims over fifty years of practice—near the end of her career, Bishop undertook illustrating Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, a task that reinforced her affinity with Austen’s novels about young women in Regency England. Austen, she said, sketches in only what she believes is important about a portrayal and yet convinces the reader that the picture is utterly complete: “She doesn’t describe, in detail, environments; while she gives you the immediate social context of individual characters, she is silent about the wider context—you don’t know the general economic situation, or that England was at war.”¹ Such was Bishop’s “social realism” centered wholly on the study of the enigmatic modern woman—no lecturing.

There was not necessarily an explicit social program that she assigned to the catalogue of women she eventually built, either, she said. There was serendipity to the subjects that caught her attention. She painted the girls who came and went from the office buildings, shops, and cafés around her studio in Union Square because they were suddenly there, she explained; they moved in and out of her frame of vision as spirits to which she gave form.

Blowing Smoke Rings possesses that ethereal quality that characterizes all of Bishop’s work. The face and figure of the young woman seem to emerge slowly out of a haze. It takes a while to collect the visual data. Eventually we see the split zipper or torn seam in the girl’s skirt, a poignant detail.

The thin veils of light, transparent color, soft contours, and delicate cross-hatching never betray the fact that Bishop’s gossamer web of a painting was rather laboriously

constructed. She painted slowly, beginning often with sketches, drawings, and even etchings and aquatints, which were often essential steps to painting. Etching enabled her to see a composition clearly in terms of line, while aquatint offered chance effects of light, shade, and tone.

When she extracted an image out of her studies and set about to paint, the process of pulling form and mood out of the surface of the panel was itself a process of discovery. Having thoroughly prepared her panels with eight coats of gesso, she established a ground of random horizontal gray stripes using gelatin, powdered charcoal, and white lead—a technique used by Peter Paul Rubens. Bishop was a dedicated student of the Old Masters. She next drew in her subject with pencil, ink, or tempera, then applied thin layers of varnish across the field so as to create luminosity. Using a limited palette of flesh tones and—in the case of *Blowing Smoke Rings*, cool blue, silvery white, and steely gray—she dabbed color atop this tacky surface. In places she knit together forms with fine tempera strokes.² The overall impression is of a figure once observed and filtered through the memory. It is a distillation, as Bishop would have it, of the particularities that defined for her not an era and not a place, but a singularly haunting moment.

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Notes

1. Bishop, in the afterword to her illustrated edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published 1974; quoted in Helen Yglesias, *Isabel Bishop* (Chesterfield, MA: Chameleon Books, 1989), 23.

2. A thorough discussion of Bishop’s practice is laid out by Yglesias, 17–18.



Philip Evergood (1901–1973)

22. *Bowery Movie*, 1932

Oil on canvas
25 × 30 inches (63.5 × 76.2 cm)
Signed and dated at lower left: Philip Evergood / 32

When Philip Evergood began his study with George Luks at the Art Students League in New York, the aspiring artist's painter father, Miles Blashki, rejoiced, imagining the possibilities that might come of his son's non-traditional studies with the free-spirited Luks. "Luks is a damned good painter," Evergood recalled his father's counsel, "I'm glad you're with a man like that. He's a human guy . . . I hope you get the spirit of life from him as well as learn a bit about painting."¹ He still lacked the confidence at that moment in 1923 and 1924 to throw himself into painting, instead insistently working to hone his draftsmanship under Luks. It was Evergood's association with the famed Ashcan school painter and his burgeoning friendships with the like-minded John Sloan and Reginald Marsh that helped draw Evergood out of the studio and into the artists' haunts around Fourteenth Street in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side in the late 1920s. "I was beginning to make a few sketches of a Bowery movie theater I remember," Evergood recalled, "with a little yellow-haired girl at the ticket counter with her little face sticking out of a round hole in the glass and a big fat cop standing at the curb."² He was not yet a painter when he first drew there—but the Depression would make him one, Evergood said: "[T]he real urge to paint America . . . only came when the Depression came and people were actually sitting on the curb with their

tongues hanging out. That's what really brought me to life."³ So, from his earlier shorthand pencil jottings and his now-disturbed musings, Evergood in 1932 painted that kaleidoscopic scene at the Comet movie theater—the yellow-haired, round-face girl, the big, black, threatening-looking policeman, the movie posters, and an innocent child blithely putting on her roller skates—when the tensions of that time and that fraught place, the Bowery, were made palpable.⁴ And he painted in a kind of agitated manner that would become his signature style.

His encounter with homeless and hungry and beleaguered men in a shantytown on Christopher Street that winter of 1932 turned Evergood into a political artist: "That's what woke me up more than anything Luks could have done to me."⁵ The Depression awakened him to a sense of purpose in art making from which he never wavered. He believed that the working artist was bound to all other working men and women, that his art was an instrument to address the economic and social injustices they suffered, and that art could and should as its highest calling raise up the masses in solidarity and hope. He was an enthusiastic participant in the New Deal art programs, as both a muralist and an easel painter. Evergood fought for artists' rights and advocated for an extension of the WPA, for a permanent federal program both to support artists and to advance the arts in America.⁶



Philip Evergood (1901–1973)

23. *Classroom History*, 1938

Oil on canvas
71 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 47 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (181.3 × 121.3 cm)
Signed with the artist's initials at lower right: PE

His *Classroom History* was painted as a submission to the Fine Arts Program in 1938, its subject reflecting its intended audience of school children, the children of immigrants, who here learn the lesson of their past as the foundation of what Evergood believed to be the promise of their future in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic America.⁷

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Notes

1. Evergood to Forrest Selvig, Oral history interview with Philip Evergood, December 3, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Miles (originally Myre) Evergood Blashki was from a family of Polish Jews; he came to the United States by way of Australia, where he was born. In 1914, Miles Blashki legally dropped his surname in 1914 and retained “Evergood” for his son and himself; see Kendall Frances Taylor, “Philip Evergood and the Humanist Intention,” PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1979, 9.

2. Evergood to Forrest Selvig, December 3, 1968. The jottings are reproduced in Taylor, figs. 11–12.

3. Evergood to Forrest Selvig, December 3, 1968.

4. A photograph of what appears to be this painting but in a preliminary stage of development, and still undated, is reproduced in Taylor's dissertation, fig. 14, and again in Taylor's 1987 monograph, expanded as an exhibition catalogue: *Philip Evergood: Never Separate from the Heart* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1987), p. 64. Evergood at first included the figure of a down-trodden man sitting on the curb in

the foreground, an element that dominates the composition, even more than the figure of the policeman, who attracts little attention at the periphery. Yet such a sobering and dominant foreground figure does not appear in the pencil studies for “Bowery Movie.” He painted it out on second thought, opting for less editorializing perhaps and more nuance in this scene of street life, adding in its place the child and her roller skates—only a vague silhouette of the earlier figure remains as a shadow on the pavement. The “fat policeman” Evergood remembered so vividly is just that in the revised version of the painting. With these changes, he then dated the painting, 1932. I am grateful to Andrew Schoelkopf and Erin Cecil for these observations.

5. Evergood to Forrest Selvig, December 3, 1968.

6. See Patricia Hills, “Art and Politics in the Popular Front: The Union Work and Social Realism of Philip Evergood,” in Alejandro Anreas, et al, *The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 181–200.

7. According to an inscription on the back of an archival photograph in the files of the Federal Art Project (FAP), the painting was hanging in P.S. 70 in May of 1938. The FAP archives also includes a photograph of another large painting which is a much expanded version of this same subject—that photograph is erroneously identified as a watercolor sketch, and it is also labeled as a work for P.S. 70. The painting's whereabouts are unknown. See Federal Art Project, Photographic Division collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Evergood painted a related large-scale composition in 1938, *The Future Belongs to Them* (with Debra Force Fine Art, New York, 2018).



24. *The Wall*, 1941

Gouache on paper
22½ × 18 inches (57.1 × 45.7 cm)
Signed and dated at lower left: J. Lawrence 1941;
dedicated on the original mat: To Helen Grayson
from Jacob Lawrence

Jacob Lawrence painted *The Wall* in late 1941, while living in New Orleans. Although Lawrence was a New York-based artist, whose early work had included street scenes and images of daily Black life in Harlem, the scope of his artistic interest—and renown—had recently begun to expand. In the late 1930s, he had completed three ambitious historical series, on the lives of important Black figures like Toussaint L'Ouverture and Harriet Tubman. Just the year before, he had won a prestigious Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, which allowed him to complete *The Migration Series* (1941; The Phillips Collection and The Museum of Modern Art), a series of sixty paintings on the Great Migration of southern African Americans to the United States North. Lawrence was in New Orleans, in fact, on a second Rosenwald Fellowship, which he had won with a proposal to create a series of paintings on the life of radical abolitionist John Brown, not unlike his earlier biographical series. With this plan and the Fellowship's funding in hand, in July of 1941, Lawrence set out for New Orleans—accompanied by his new wife, fellow artist Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, who he had married earlier the same month.

Although Lawrence's parents were from different parts of the South, and he had studied the region extensively for *The Migration Series*, the trip to New Orleans was to be the first time he had visited the region himself. The experience was, for Lawrence, a kind of shock; although the artist had read about, and even painted, the effects of southern racism

and legally-sanctioned segregation, in New Orleans, “for the first time [he] really felt it,” as he later described.¹ The rooms on Bienville Avenue that the Lawrences rented from a Black New Orleanian became a refuge for the couple—and it was there that Lawrence, true to his plan, went on to paint the twenty-two panels that would become *The Legend of John Brown* (1941; Detroit Institute of Arts), completing it in the months after they arrived.²

The Wall belongs to another set of paintings that Lawrence began in New Orleans—separate from the “official” project of the *John Brown* series, and with a different orientation. In these works, Lawrence turned outward, attempting to come to grips with New Orleans, its urban space, people, and culture—channeling the sharp powers of observation he had honed painting Harlem street scenes in the 1930s. In works like *Rampart Street* (1941; Portland Art Museum), *Catholic New Orleans* (University Art Museum, Berkeley), and *Bus* (fig. 1), Lawrence captures different parts of the city's distinctive architecture and culture—from the elaborate wrought-iron grillwork that adorns many of its buildings, to the blend of religious traditions practiced by its residents, to the legacy of the overlapping waves of immigration that shaped the city's history. *The Wall* sits neatly within this group of artworks—reflecting the unique presence of levees within New Orleans.

Unlike the panels of *The Legend of John Brown*, which he crafted as one cohesive series, Lawrence regularly sent his





Fig. 1. Jacob Lawrence, *Bus*, 1941. Gouache on paper, 17 × 22 inches (43.2 × 55.9 cm). Private collection

New Orleans paintings to his gallerist in New York, Edith Halpert, who sold them individually from her Downtown Gallery; in the case of *The Wall*, Lawrence sent the work directly to a collector and supporter, designer Helen Grayson.³ Due in part to this history of their sale—so different from the panels of *The Migration Series*, which Lawrence and his representatives endeavored to keep together—the New Orleans works have typically been understood as single, discrete works. There are reasons to consider the New Orleans paintings as a related set of artworks, however—if not one of the artist’s carefully planned narrative “series,” then certainly what he sometimes called a “theme,” a group of works loosely adhered around a common set of interests.⁴

When placed alongside the other New Orleans works, for example, *The Wall* no longer appears a straightforward reflection on the city’s built environment. Instead, it becomes part of a wider exploration of barriers, partitions, and

obstructions, which appear across many of the paintings—the divider in *Bar and Grill* (fig. 2), which separates the Black and white sections of a restaurant; the betting-rings of *The Green Table* (1941; private collection), which hem in the Black gambler in its lower register; or even the kind of negative-barrier, the barrier by absence, implied in the empty windows separating the airy front and crowded rear of the vehicle in *Bus*. If Lawrence evidences a decided interest in the architecture and urban space of New Orleans, in other words, this interest is in service of a deeper interrogation of the structuring effects of segregation, how it shaped the city’s physical form and the lives of its people—the ways it became so deeply embedded as to become a kind of infrastructure.

With this context, it is easier to appreciate the ways that Lawrence has depicted the levee in *The Wall*: its foreboding massiveness, for example, which looms over the family who hurries past it. It becomes harder, too, to ignore the paint-



Fig. 2. Jacob Lawrence, *Bar and Grill*, 1941. Gouache on paper, 16¾ × 22¾ inches (42.5 × 57.8 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum. Bequest of Henry Ward Ranger through the National Academy of Design, 2010.52

ing’s daring, the way it gives over almost the entire composition to the levee’s utter flatness—harnessing the implied infinity of the modernist grid to further the impression of the wall’s dominance, the never-endingness of Jim Crow. This refusal of almost any sense of compositional depth creates a powerful sense of constriction, not unlike the one that had characterized Lawrence’s own experience in New Orleans. Ultimately, though, *The Wall* clarifies that the stakes of this confinement are broader than any single individual’s experience; in its choice to focus on a young Black family, it raises the question of the multi-generational effects of segregation and discrimination. The painting is blunt on this front; not only is each member of the family burdened with their own load—from the father’s briefcase to the youngest child’s dangling doll—but the direction of their movement, and their implied futures, is set directly against the levee’s unyielding mass of brick. In *The Wall*, in other words, we feel

the edge of Lawrence’s sharpening social critique, which he would bring to bear on a range of issues in the subsequent decades of his career—as well as his enduring commitment to depicting the human dimension of these issues.

CLAIRE ITTNER

Notes

1. Aline B. Louchheim, “Lawrence: Quiet Spokesman,” *ArtNews* (October 15, 1944).
2. Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 65; Ellen Sharp, “The Legend of John Brown and the Series by Jacob Lawrence,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 67, no. 4 (1993): 14–35.
3. Grayson had also written Lawrence a letter of recommendation for his Rosenwald Fellowship in 1940.
4. See quotations in Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence, American Painter*, 143; and transcript of interview by Peter Nesbett and Michelle DuBois, June 7, 1999, 1–2, quoted in Sims, “The Structure of Narrative: Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence’s Builders Paintings, 1946–1998,” 215n35.

Guy Pène du Bois (1884–1958)

25. *New Evidence*, 1944

Oil on canvas
18 x 22 inches (45.7 x 55.9 cm)
Signed and dated at lower right: Guy Pène du Bois / 1944



Rockwell Kent (1882–1971)

26. *For Us the Living*, 1943

Watercolor, gouache and pencil on paper
mounted on board
12¼ x 9½ inches (31.1 x 24.1 cm)
Signed, dated and dedicated at lower left:
To Bobbie and / Lewis Merrill 1943 / Rockwell Kent



27. *The Negro Troop*, 1935–36

Tempera on panel
24 × 30 inches (61 × 76.2 cm)
Signed and dated at lower left: Helen Wessells '36;
signed, dated and inscribed with the title on verso: The
Negro Troop / Helen Wessells / 35



Fig. 1. “Bye Bye, See You in Two Weeks,”
Daily News (New York), September 9, 1935,
p. 20. The photo caption goes on to say,
“Plenty of Harlemites turned out to see
the boys go.”

Every year at summer’s end the famed 369th Infantry closed out the National Guard training camp at Camp Smith, their ceremonial departure from the West 143rd Street armory in Harlem for their two-weeks in Upstate Peekskill bringing out Harlemites in the thousands to see them off. Mothers, wives, and sweethearts lavished fond good-byes upon their men—in 1935 the Guardsmen numbered more than 1,100. The great, boisterous display of community and patriotism regularly drew photographers for the photo pages of the *Daily News* (fig. 1). The 369th was the pride of Harlem—the pride of all New York. Their annual encampment always drew tens of thousands to the closing Visitor’s Day at Camp Smith, when the Governor bestowed honors upon the legendary Black regiment.¹ The company had an illustrious history as fighting men. A regiment of Black infantrymen had been formed in Harlem in 1917. Constituted as the 369th, it was designated a combat unit and was among the first sent to France. Assigned by General John J. Pershing to French divisions, the troops fought in the deadliest campaigns of the Great War. It was the Germans who dubbed them “Hellfighters.” The French awarded them the *Croix de Guerre*.²

It is not hard to see why a painter might have been attracted to the rousing parade of the proud Harlem Hellfighters. But Helen Wessells took a point of view on her subject that is unconventional among illustrators of such military displays and that owes much, it seems fair to say, to her sex. Wessells has focused not on the troops but on the women on the sidelines—the mothers, wives, sweethearts, and daughters, and the joy and pride and affection on their faces and in their spirited embrace of their men.





This work provides evidence of what Wessells learned at New York's Art Students League under her teachers Kenneth Hayes Miller and Thomas Hart Benton: a command of old master painting techniques, like tempera, and a focus, as in Miller's art, on New York street life, especially on the milieu of women. Wessells was Miller's assistant at the Art Students League in 1925 and 1926, and she participated, too, in Benton's class as a scholarship recipient, both distinctions that are indications of the promise that the school's luminaries saw in her.³

Yet, this is a rare extant painting by Wessells. The question is, why? In 1924 she married a fellow student of Miller, Lynn Fausett, who went on to be president of the League from 1932 to 1936. Fausett was a muralist, the studio assistant to the renowned Art Deco designer Hildreth Meière, and possibly Wessells's career was overwhelmed by her husband's—they divorced in 1936.⁴ Moreover, her choice to absent herself from Manhattan for Westchester County, where she lived her entire life, limited her associations with the city's art elite, though reportedly she had friendships with Reginald Marsh and Isabel Bishop, whose dusky paintings of the city's street life this tempera recalls.⁵ She had but a brief moment on the New York art scene, exhibiting at the Whitney Studio Club in 1926 and 1927, and occasionally in the 1930s at the Art Students League, at the non-profit G.R.D. Studio, and at Midtown Galleries, where she was represented.⁶ Her obituary tells us that Wessells developed a strong local reputation in her hometown of Mamaroneck, New York, even as she supported herself in various occupations outside of art. She was president of the Mamaroneck Artist Guild and a director of the New Rochelle Art Association.⁷

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Notes

1. See, for example, "25,000 Watch Review at Camp by Lehman: Governor Is Guest of Harlem Guard Regiment at Record Turnout of Visitors," *The New York Times*, September 14, 1936, 2.

2. See "The Harlem Hellfighters: The Full Story," military.com/history/harlem-hellfighters-full-story.

3. The only extensive research done on Wessells to date is that of art historian Tom Parker, Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, who has generously shared with me his extensive notes.

4. See "Lynn Fausett," an informative piece on the artist published at the International Hildreth Meière Association, hildrethmeiere.org/lynn-fausett.

5. Fausett and Wessells collaborated on a copy of Emanuel Leutze's group portrait of the signers of the Alaska Treaty for the Alaska Historical Library and Museum, Juneau, photograph in Frick Art Research Library photo archive.

6. *The Annual and Biennial Exhibition Record of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1918–1989* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1991), 415. For a review of G. R. D. Studio show which calls out Wessells' submission; see Ruth Green Harrah, "Further News of the Week," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1931, 118. Edwin Alden Jewell, "Art in Review," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1933, 11; and "A Reviewer's Busy Week: In the Local Galleries," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1934, X8. Notes on Wessells at the Art Students League; see "A Reviewer's Notebook: Among New Exhibitions," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1936, X9. Wessells participated in an unusual group show of two dozen women artists at Contemporary Arts Gallery wherein the exhibitors, all wives of artists, were identified, for shock value, by their married names; see Edwin Alden Jewell, "Wives Without Husbands," *The New York Times*, September 24, 1933, XX6.

7. "Helen Wessells," obit., in *Daily Item* (Port Chester, N.Y.), December 7, 1985, 4. The 1940 U.S. Federal Census records Wessells living with her parents in Rye, New York, and her occupation as "sales clerk," having no other sources of income; and the 1950 census lists Helen Fausett Richmond now as a newspaper advertising salesperson in Mamaroneck; see 1940 and 1950 United States Federal Census, ancestry.com. Yet, her death certificate identifies Wessells as "artist," certificate of death, 11-30-1985, Seattle, State of Washington, U.S. Death Records, 1907–2017, ancestry.com.

28. *Chess and Politics*, c. 1934

Oil on canvas
22 × 26 inches (55.9 × 66 cm)
Signed at lower right: J. FRENCH

Around 1934, when Jared French was newly-employed under the Federal government's first relief program for artists, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), he must have begun formulating the ideas that would later openly express how the artist under state sponsorship might assert individual identity, establish personal iconography, and uphold social conscience while conforming to the official dictate to paint "The American Scene." One approach to socially-conscious art is to choose the "noblest expressions of people and society and to demonstrate them as unalloyed goodness," as French would go on to say. The other is to "choose the subversive, selfish and deadening expressions and to display them in all their destructive malignity." Dark satire, he asserted, had a place in public works of art as an effective means to make plain and ultimately cast out America's social evils.¹

Under the Works Progress Administration—which subsumed the pilot program, PWAP—French painted public murals and easel paintings. The latter were shown regularly in exhibitions, and they launched French nationally first and foremost as an American Scene painter. His dark satire was primarily aimed at despair and injustice in hard economic times. Whatever controversies that attended them were primarily due to their homoerotic subtexts and not to politics.

But one painting French produced at this time did challenge American politics: this canvas, *Chess and Politics*, dated to around 1934. There is no record of its being exhibited in French's lifetime, so there is no known measure of the contemporaneous response it could have elicited. In scholarship, the painting's subject and the artist's possible intention in creating it have never been addressed.²

The subject of the chess match as a metaphor for gamesmanship between politicians is rather commonplace now,

and has some history in art and literature as a stand-in for the war games of kings and queens and the test of wills in gentlemanly disputes. But chess came into its own only in the early twentieth century and in the Soviet Union, as Joseph Stalin deliberately employed the game as a tool to control the proletariat and, by this form of mental training, produce a state of armchair warriors ever at the ready to serve. Chess was an officially mandated pastime for Stalin's workforce, and by 1934 had an obvious association with the Soviet Union.³

French's *Chess and Politics* followed soon after the newly-elected President Franklin Roosevelt officially recognized the Soviet Union on November 16, 1933. The U.S. Government had broken off diplomatic relations with Russia in 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution, but Roosevelt had been keen to reestablish official recognition so as to serve America's strategic and economic interests.⁴ French's painting lays out in some detail the overwhelming challenge that Roosevelt faced in trying to normalize relations with the corrupt, even amoral Stalin regime. That he was able to paint a cast of characters who had a place in this dark geo-political game, shows how closely French must have followed it.

When Roosevelt's move to recognize the Soviet Union was announced, French seems clearly to have been compelled to revisit his art student past and a work by his mentor at the Art Students League, the political satirist Boardman Robinson, the only artist French ever acknowledged as an influence on him.⁵ French had studied with Robinson in 1926 and admired him long after, and must have known Robinson's lithograph, *Checkmate, Gentlemen* (fig. 1), Robinson's commentary on Vladimir Lenin's out-manuevering of French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, America's President





Fig. 1. Boardman Robinson, *Checkmate, Gentlemen*, 1920. Lithograph, image: 8¼ × 11¼ inches (21 × 29.8 cm), sheet: 10⅞ × 14 inches (27 × 35.6 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased with the Lola Downin Peck Fund from the Carl and Laura Zigrosser Collection, 1974-24-180

Woodrow Wilson, and British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who in 1919 tried in vain to negotiate a peace deal with the Bolsheviks and welcome Russia back into the diplomatic fold.⁶ French in 1934 would paint the bookend to Robinson's 1920 picture. In building his complex narrative, French might also have taken his composition from Lucas van Leyden's comic *Chess Players* of 1507, an allegory of a woman's trickery and deceit (fig. 2); French was an admirer of northern Renaissance art and had a large collection of reproductions of Old Master paintings.⁷

It must be Stalin who plays white here, at right, and he is likely surrounded by the famous chess masters who occupied specific roles in Stalin's machine. Not all of the faces are as easily identifiable as Stalin's, but we can reasonably make a few key associations. Leon Trotsky, an avid chess player, appears to be the bearded man standing at center. Having been banished from the Politburo by his rival Stalin, he had a keen interest in a changing balance of power and here watches the match closely. At center, seated between the players, is possibly the man who was at the center of the Soviet chess world and also of Stalin's reign of terror: Nikolai Krylenko (fig. 3). He was a pamphleteer and editor of the Soviet chess magazine, which is possibly why French would have shown him with papers in his jacket pocket. Krylenko wrote "Politics and Chess" which became Stalin's particular "Five-Year Plan" to reform the proletariat through chess. He was also known internationally as the sadistic Justice Minister who instituted the famous public sham trials to purge the government of "wreckers" or traitors. In the

United States his name was familiar to New York intellectuals by virtue of his painter-sister, Eliena Krylenko, and her American husband, the leftist journalist Max Eastman.⁸

Standing in support of Stalin on the right side of the picture are figures that might represent other key players, like novelist Maxim Gorky (the mustachioed man in brown, perhaps), who had become a propagandist for Stalin, and auto manufacturer Henry Ford (in his businessman's suit and tie), who had already signed a pact with Stalin in 1929 to build a duplicate of his grand new River Rouge auto plant on the banks of the Volga.⁹ The identities of the men and women on the left side of the table, at least some of them Americans in this satirical geo-political game we might assume, have proven elusive in this research.



Fig. 2. Lucas van Leyden, *Chess Players*, c. 1508. Oil on panel, 11 × 14½ inches (28.1 × 36 cm). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Inv. 574A



Fig. 3. Nikolai Krylenko, reproduced on the front page of the Russian newspaper *Zvezda*, July 2, 1925

Everyone had an agenda in the U.S.-Soviet match-up. But what might French's agenda have been in taking it as a subject for painting? It is daring for an artist on Roosevelt's WPA payroll: is it a cautionary tale on the dangers of using the arts for political ends? Is it also possible that the subject was personal as well as political for French? Perhaps he understood what the world-wise men in his circle would have known: that among the many unholy alliances Roosevelt stood to make with Stalinists were those with the likes of the brutal and despised Krylenko who, among his many other acts of terror against perceived enemies of the state, wrote into the Soviet penal code the statute criminalizing homosexuality, and with the internationally beloved Gorky, who vehemently supported it.¹⁰

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. The quotations are from the "Credo" that carried Paul Cadmus's name in the brochure accompanying his 1937 show at Midtown Galleries, New York, but authorship is now given to French; see *Modern American Realism: The Sara Roby Foundation Collection* by Virginia M. Mecklenburg (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, 1987), 36; and Mark Cole, "Jared French," PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1999, 197-99.

2. The painting was published in the catalogue of Christie's American paintings sale, May 29, 1989, lot 299, without documentation or commentary. It was included in the checklist of known works in Cole's doctoral dissertation in 1999, 365-66, checklist no. C1934.11 (the "C" designation meaning "circa"). It was most recently published by Ilene Fort in the exhibition catalogue, *American Paintings in Southern California Collections: From Gilbert Stuart to Georgia O'Keeffe* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996), 25, 91.

3. Source material on Soviet chess is abundant; see especially Andrew Soltis, *Soviet Chess, 1917-1991* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2000).

4. I have relied upon the lengthy report published online by the U.S. State Department, Office of the Historian, in the "Milestones in the History of Foreign Relations" series: "Recognition of the Soviet Union, 1933," history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/ussr.

5. Cole, 30.

6. U.S. State Department, Office of the Historian, "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, "The Bullitt Mission to Soviet Russia, 1919," history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/bullitt-mission.

7. The possible source was identified by Charles Brock in reference to a chess-themed painting by French's close friend George Tooker; see Charles Brock, "George Tooker, *The Chess Game*, 1947" in *Twentieth-Century American Art: The Ebsworth Collection* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 263.

8. Krylenko's role as the chess master in Stalin's machine is discussed at length in Soltis, 24-25, 45-47, 102-03, 113-14. Also see, "Nikolai Krylenko: The Main Goals of the Chess/Checkers Movement" (1931), February 24, 2019, chess.com; and "Armchair Warrior: Nikolai Krylenko," expertchesslessons.wordpress.com/tag/nikolai-krylenko. Professor Simon A. Morrison, Department of Music, Princeton University, has kindly helped my research, positing that other of the figures are also chess masters—Alexander Alekhine, the red-haired figure standing at center, who for all his chess prowess was considered by Krylenko an enemy of the state; and possibly the German Emmanuel Lasker, at the chess table, who had been enticed into the Soviet chess machine. Professor Morrison, email to the author, November 11, 2024.

9. Thomas P. Hughes, "How America Helped Build the Soviet Machine," *American Heritage* 39, no. 8 (December 1988), americanheritage.com/how-america-helped-build-soviet-machine.

10. In his analysis of Dan Healey's *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi*, writer Samuel Clowes Huneke lays out in detail Gorky's vehement anti-homosexuality: "Politics of Hate," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, October 26, 2018, lareviewofbooks.org/article/politics-of-hate/.

Warren Wheelock (1880–1960)

29. *Sailor and His Girl*, c. 1940–49
Bubdinga wood
16¼ × 11½ × 16¾ inches (41.3 × 29.2 × 42.5 cm)
Inscribed: Wheelock



Paul Starrett Sample (1896–1974)

30. *Central Pacific Arrival*, 1943
Watercolor and pencil on paper
10 × 14 inches (25.4 × 35.6 cm)
Signed, dated and inscribed with the title at the lower right:
Central Pacific Arrival / Paul Sample – 1943 / Pearl Harbor



Charles H. Howard (1899–1978) and **Clay Spohn** (1898–1977)

31. *Nautical Mural*, 1942

Platinum leaf and oil and tempera reverse painted on glass, in three panels

46 × 90 inches (116.8 × 228.6 cm)

Signed and dated at lower left: Chas. H. Howard and C. Spohn, asst. W.P.A. – 1942

By the time he returned home from London to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1940, Charles Howard had already exhibited his first paintings, small, nature-based abstractions, alongside pioneers of Surrealism—Max Ernst, Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, Herbert Bayer, and the poets and painters of the Bloomsbury Group. He regularly had sent work to exhibitions in San Francisco, where the Howard family of artists comprised the region's art royalty—his father was architect John Galen Howard, founder of the architecture school at the University of California, Berkeley, and his brothers were modernist sculptor Robert Howard and American Scene painter John Langley Howard. Yet, never mind his reputation abroad, Charles Howard was now

little known in America outside of the Bay Area. His Works Progress Administration (WPA) mural projects for the Alameda Air Station would, in an indirect way, change that.

Howard was at work on designs for the officer's recreation hall in the new Naval Air Station when Dorothy Miller, the now legendary curator of paintings at the Museum of Modern Art, visited his studio with her husband, Holger Cahill, who, in his position as national director of the Federal Fine Arts Program, was taking stock of new work underway in the Northern California regional center.¹ Miller saw an opportunity to reintroduce Howard's work to a New York audience and selected him as one of eighteen artists from far-flung places to be highlighted in

her groundbreaking exhibition, *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*. The show established national reputations for any number of little-known regional artists—Morris Graves, Helen Lundeberg, Fletcher Martin, and Howard made up the West Coast cohort. In her catalogue forward Miller lauded the government-sponsored work of the artists as the catalyst to their productivity and success and thereby their emergence now onto the national art scene.²

Howard's WPA mural commissions would appear to be a direct contradiction of his impulse to paint biomorphic and mechanical abstract fantasies on an intimate scale—a photograph of Howard's installation in *Americans 1942* shows the artist's other work from this period (fig. 1). But

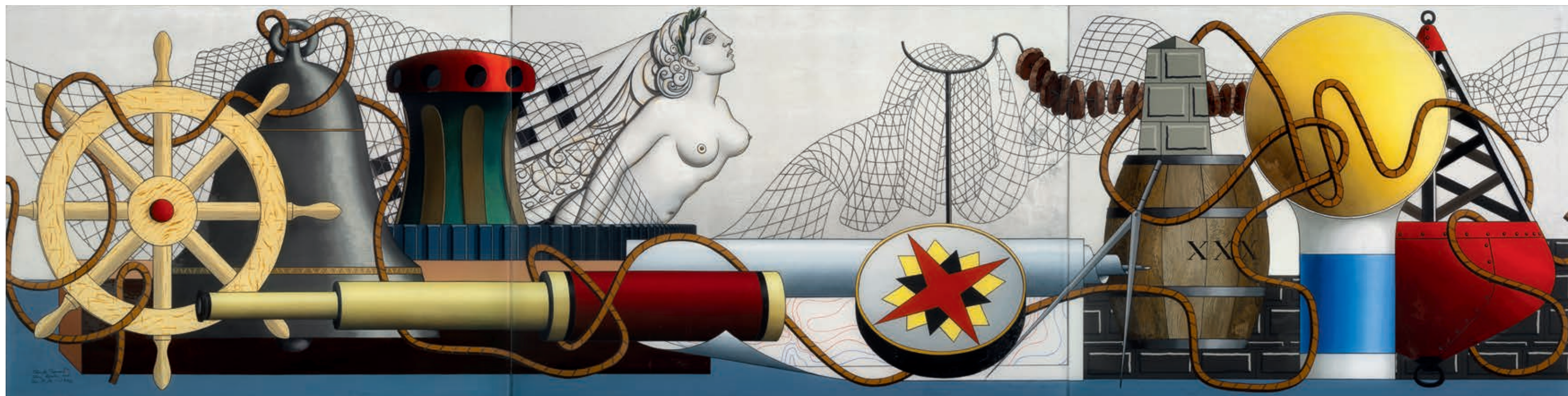




Fig. 1. Installation view, *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 21–March 8, 1942. Gelatin silver print, 7½ × 9½ inches (19 × 24.1 cm). Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives

Howard had always been a decorative muralist, learning to paint he said, in the workshop of interior designer Louis Bouché. The Naval Air Station commission was not simply an opportunity for Howard to “scale up” his easel work, but rather it allowed him to recalibrate for the occasion and embrace the idea of architectural embellishment for a military installation in a singularly appropriate way. One project he designed as an enormous tapestry depicting the aerodynamics of an airplane wing. The other, this mural, which would hang in the officer’s bar, would be a monument to Alameda’s maritime past, with its whimsical display of marine objects that includes a ship’s figure head, its helm, a compass rose, and the great round bowl of a cowl vent. And it would be rather cleverly executed in a nineteenth-century technique, too, one that possessed singular properties for filling a barroom with light: reverse painting on glass.³

The historic practice of reverse-painting on glass had been revived by modernists from Russian Wassily Kandinsky to Americans Rockwell Kent, Joseph Stella, Marsden Hartley, and most especially Rebecca Salsbury James.⁴ The process involved putting down paint layers in reverse sequence, starting with the frontmost contour drawing and ending with the backing layer. Howard chose platinum leaf for his background, just as nineteenth-century artisans had employed tin foil and tinsel in their reverse glass paintings to reflect light. The shimmering effect on this large scale also suggests an old-time barroom mirror. The execution of the great bold nautical forms required an

unflinching hand, and Howard enlisted the help of his San Francisco painter friend Clay Spohn, who, like Howard, was a superb marine draftsman.

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. About this visit: see Oral history interview with Urban Neining, September 22, 1964, conducted by Harlan Phillips, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; and Oral history interview with Clay Spohn, October 5, 1964, and September 25, 1965, conducted by Harlan Phillips, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

2. Dorothy Miller, “Foreword,” in *Americans 1942: 18 Artists from 9 States* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1942), 9. Miller was emphatic that all the work was new to New York audiences, and none of the artists included were from New York. The exhibition was on view from January 21 through March 8, 1942.

3. There is confusion in the published record about the final disposition of Howard’s commissions. The tapestry was never executed, and the full-scale painting for it was deposited by the United States General Services Administration with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1943; see Apsara DiQuinzio, “In and Around Margins,” in *Charles Howard: A Margin of Chaos* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2017), 26–27. But Clay Spohn, Urban Neining, and Harlan Phillips all make clear in their oral histories that the reverse glass mural hung and remained hanging in the officer’s bar. The mural was eventually returned to Spohn, but this was probably well after Spohn’s interviews in 1964 and 1965, when the officer’s building was renovated in the 1970s; see the brochure by Marshall Davis, *Alameda Naval Air Station, 1940–1944: History of NAS Alameda, the Piers, and Building 77* (Alameda, CA: Alameda Naval Air Museum, 2014).

4. I have relied on these studies of modernism’s reverse painting revivals: Karli Wurzelbacher, “Reverse Painting on Glass: Seeing Through the Surface of American Modernism,” PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2018; and Simon Seger, et al., “Kandinsky’s Fragile Art: A Multidisciplinary Investigation of Four Early Reverse Glass Paintings (1911–1914) by Wassily Kandinsky,” *Heritage Science*, 7, no. 27 (2019).



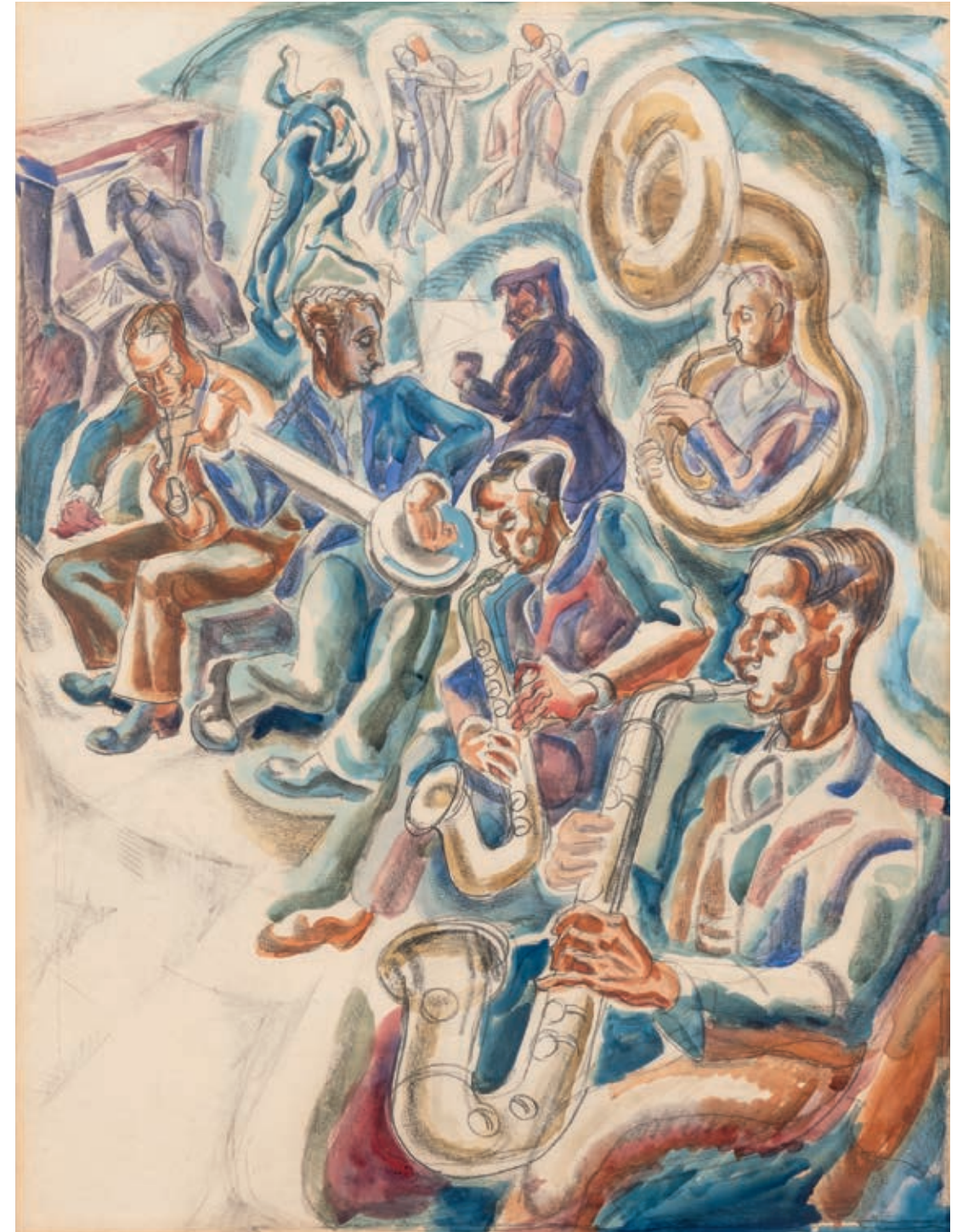
Jan Matulka (1890–1972)

32. *Ocean Dreams*, c. 1930
Oil and sand on canvas
27¼ × 32½ inches (69.2 × 82.5 cm)
Signed at lower right: Matulka



James Daugherty (1889–1974)

33. *Jazz Musicians*, c. 1934–35
Watercolor and pencil on paper
29½ × 20 inches (74.9 × 50.8 cm)
Signed and inscribed on verso: James
Daugherty / Westport / Conn; stamped with
the estate stamp on verso: James Daugherty /
ESTATE OF / JAMES H. DAUGHERTY



Enid Bell (1904–1994)

34. *Nightclub (Last Dance)*, c. 1945
Redwood on painted wood base
15 × 8 × 5 inches (38.1 × 20.3 × 12.7 cm)
Inscribed: ENID BELL



Herbert Jacob Gute (1907–1977)

35. *Raising the Tent*
Tempera on card
25½ × 18¾ inches (64.8 × 47.6 cm)
Signed at lower left: HERBERT J GUTE



John Stuart Curry (1897–1946)

36. *At the Circus*, 1936

Oil and tempera on board

20¼ × 30½ inches (51.4 × 76.5 cm)

Signed, dated and inscribed with the title at lower left:

“AT THE CIRCUS” / JOHN STEUART CURRY / 1936

In 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, painter John Stuart Curry, having curtailed his periodic travels back to his native Kansas from his home in Westport, Connecticut, was nevertheless footloose, in search of subject matter for paintings. The Kansas scenes that had made Curry’s reputation in 1928, and that he continued to develop following his initial success with these novel subjects, were met with surprising derision when they were shown on his home turf in 1931, in exhibitions in Chicago, St. Louis, Topeka, and Kansas City. Curry’s New York dealer, Maynard Walker, had planned the circuit hoping to promote Curry in an untapped regional market but failed miserably at his effort, producing no sales in economic hard times and forcing the artist to endure the unexpected criticisms of his fellow Kansans.

Still reeling from the disappointments of the previous months, struggling, as he put it, to get “on my feet,” he made arrangements in April 1932 to follow the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus as the troupe embarked from Manhattan on its spring tour.¹ He would travel with it during the next two months, from Washington, D.C. through Pennsylvania and New Jersey, departing in mid-June, after the traveling circus finished its swing through southern Connecticut.

There was precedent for Curry’s fascination with the circus. His debut at the always lively and closely watched Whitney Studio Galleries in New York in April 1929 had been his entry in a much-talked about exhibition, *The Circus in Paint*.² The elaborate show—organized by Gertrude

Vanderbilt Whitney’s impresario of new American art, Julianna Force—was staged as its own version of the Big Top, a clever installation created by the painter and interior designer Louis Bouché. Curry already knew from this earlier experience that the circus on canvas could charm patrons and critics, and he would draw upon it once again. The great trapeze artist, Alfredo Codona, the marquee name, made the arrangements for Curry to follow the company, his association with Curry’s endeavor securing for the artist unlimited access to the action at center ring, behind the scenes, and on the back lots.

Over these two months Curry would sketch in crayon, ink, and watercolor, the manifold scenes of circus life and especially of the death-defying feats of its magnificent aerial performers, creating an abundance of source material for subsequent paintings. Immediately upon his return to Westport, Curry embarked on what would be a pathbreaking work for him, a painting that would win him a place in the permanent collection of the new Whitney Museum of American Art for a second time. *The Flying Codonas* (Whitney Museum of American Art) was purchased by Whitney from the museum’s first survey exhibition of contemporary American painting in November 1932; a year earlier, his *Baptism in Kansas* of 1928 was acquired by Mrs. Whitney with much fanfare.

With the honor accorded *The Flying Codonas*, Walker’s promotion of Curry would now take a new tack: in April 1933 he ceremoniously opened an exhibition of his artist’s





Fig. 1. Watercolor by John Steuart Curry inscribed “Alfredo and Lalo” and dated 1932, as reproduced in Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry’s Pageant of America* (New York: American Artists Group, 1943), no. 191

new circus paintings to coincide with the return of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Baily show to Madison Square Garden for another season—even the Codonas appeared alongside their friend Curry at the unveiling of the new work.³ Circus themes henceforth would become as much a part of Curry’s artistic identity as Kansas subjects, and they would figure in his repertory for years.

The crowd scene was a departure from Curry’s usual focus on the circus performers, but the audience is, after all, the other side of the yin and yang of the spectacle. On the spot, presumably, Curry created a highly finished ink-and-watercolor illustration depicting the relatable moment of a child’s unbridled delight at the kaleidoscopic light show and the derring-do that was the Codona family’s trapeze act—Alfredo, his brother Lalo, and Alfredo’s wife, Vera, were famous for swinging to heights unmatched by any other aerialists (fig. 1).⁴ Possibly Curry intended the watercolor for publication, titling it “Alfredo and Lalo,” making clear the focus of the little boy’s uncontainable excitement. This sweet vignette of a father’s caring embrace of his joyful child proved a powerful symbol: Curry employed it in other circus paintings, in ways that under-

score what was poignant and discordant about the diverse assembly of people gathered together under the Big Top. It is the source of *At the Circus*. It is background as well for *The Runway* (1932, fig. 2). There, the homogenous spectator group of wholesome American families is a dissonant backdrop to the plaintive note struck by the sober parade of exotic performers in the foreground as they exit the arena, men and women who have dropped their show faces and now appear drained of anything like the spirit that infuses their buoyant admirers, exhibiting the emotional toll taken by a performer’s way of life.

The cluster of circus itinerants, many of them immigrants, all of them uprooted, vagabonds for much of the year, ran counter to traditional views of the American family and community. Their condition resonated with Curry, who was himself struggling with loss and estrangement at this time. He was separated from his sickly wife, Clara, and drifting. He was also emotionally upended by the calamitous effects of the Dust Bowl on the Curry family’s Kansas homestead. The post office in his hometown of Dunavant, Kansas closed in 1932—the town literally disappeared off the map—and his parents were now isolated there among



Fig. 2. John Steuart Curry, *The Runway*, 1932. Oil on panel, 30½ × 40 inches (77.5 × 101.6 cm). Swarthmore College Art Collection. Gift of Frederic Newlin Price, Class of 1905

the fallen down houses and fields of weeds.⁵ Curry in this year was himself without home and roots.

In the context of Curry’s life circumstances, *At the Circus* can be viewed as a deeply personal painting, born of reflection on his own boyhood, a pattern of rumination that emerged with his first Kansas paintings.⁶ At center *At the Circus* shows us not one child, as in Curry’s original drawing, but three boys—the three Curry boys, perhaps—the two older boys reveling in the high spirits of their baby brother. Such was the attachment of the Curry siblings. The youngest of the Curry boys, the artist’s beloved “baby brother,” Paul Curry, had died an untimely death at age twenty-two in 1927, after years of physical suffering. The tragedy of that loss haunted John Steuart Curry to the end of his life, destroyed what had been his deep spiritual faith and created fissures within the Curry family. Lifelong grief and middle-aged spiritual crisis brought forth from Curry paintings not simply of a place. “His art was something different from what was generally understood as Regionalism,” Curry’s friend and biographer Laurence Schmeckebier asserted, a radical claim in 1943, but an apt one, it seems, upon further study. Curry’s subjects we find time and again

are rich with personal associations: they are the places, experiences, and people that filled his memories of home and of a golden age of boyhood time.⁷

PATRICIA JUNKER

Notes

1. For a full account of the episode with the circus see Patricia Junker, “John Steuart Curry and the Pathos of Modern Life: Paintings of the Outcast and the Dispossessed,” in *John Steuart Curry: Inventing the Middle West* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1998), 151–64. Curry’s comments on his state of mind appear in a letter to Maynard Walker, August 1, 1932, Maynard Walker Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

2. See Junker, 156.

3. See descriptions of the exhibition and reviews in Junker, “The Life and Career of John Steuart Curry: An Annotated Chronology,” in *John Steuart Curry: Inventing the Middle West*, 222–23.

4. The drawing, its present whereabouts unknown, is reproduced in Laurence E. Schmeckebier, *John Steuart Curry’s Pageant of America* (New York: American Artists Group, 1943), 216–17, no. 191.

5. The Dunavant Post Office was closed in 1932 and Curry’s parents were eventually compelled to leave; see Patricia Junker, “John Steuart Curry: Homecoming,” in *John Steuart Curry: Weathering the Storm*, ed. Art Martin (Muskegon, MI: Muskegon Museum of Art, 2024), 15–16.

6. For an analysis of the genesis of the first Kansas paintings, see Junker, “John Steuart Curry: Homecoming,” 2–7.

7. For the impact of Paul Curry’s death on his artist brother, see Junker, “John Steuart Curry: Homecoming,” 4–7.

Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975)

37. *Forward Pass*, 1970

Bronze

25¼ × 12 × 15½ inches (64.1 × 30.5 × 39.4 cm)

Inscribed, dated and numbered on the base: © / NO. 2 Benton '70; stamped with the foundry mark on the base: Harold Phippen / Foundryman

Conceived in 1970 and cast in bronze by Harold Phippen Foundryman.
The present cast is number 2 in an edition of at least 4.



Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975)

38. *Forward Pass*, 1972

Lithograph

Image size: 12¾ × 19¾ inches (32.4 × 50.2 cm)

Sheet size: 18¼ × 24 inches (46.4 × 61 cm)

Signed at lower left: Benton; signed at lower right: Benton

Conceived in oil in 1971 and circulated as lithographs by
Associated American Arts, New York, in 1972 in an edition of 250.



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Schoelkopf Gallery
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212 879 8815
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Page 4: Rockwell Kent, *For Us the Living*, detail, 1943 (pl. 26)
Pages 6–7: Georgia Engelhard, *The White Church*, detail, c. 1930–39 (pl. 6)

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